

STUDY ABROAD EMPLOYABILITY FACTORS:  
THE PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER RECRUITERS

By

JANET LYNN HERREN

Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications

Oklahoma State University

Stillwater, Oklahoma

2006

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate College of the  
Oklahoma State University  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for  
the Degree of  
MASTER OF SCIENCE  
December, 2008

STUDY ABROAD EMPLOYABILITY FACTORS:  
THE PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER RECRUITERS

Thesis Approved:

Dr. Cindy Blackwell

---

Thesis Adviser

---

Dr. Beulah Hirschlein

---

Dr. David Henneberry

---

Dr. A. Gordon Emslie

---

Dean of the Graduate College

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Above all, I would like to thank my committee chair, Cindy Blackwell, for always believing in me and supporting my ideas. It is vital as a student to find a mentor who believes in you and your goals, both professionally and personally. She has gone above and beyond the call of duty as a chair to assist me in this process. If every student could have a mentor like Cindy, more students would be motivated to learn and achieve their goals. Her enthusiasm helped me when I was too tired to be inspired anymore, and her sense of adventure reminded me to make life fun. Thank you!

I would also like to thank and recognize the rest of my committee, Beulah Hirschlein and David Henneberry, for their support, advice and contributions.

A special thank you also goes to Dwayne Cartmell for his assistance tabulating my results and to Shane Robinson for sharing his research and experience with me. Also, to my colleagues in Career Services for allowing me to take the time during a career fair to survey employers. Many people in Career Services were voices of encouragement and support, and that is a wonderful quality to find in your coworkers.

Along with these faculty and staff members, I would also like to recognize Ed Miller for his continued support and interest in my professional development over the years. I also have to thank Donna Birchler in the School of International Studies for her assistance during my time in graduate school.

To my friends and family, you are priceless. Thank you to my friends for celebrating my successes and believing in my goals. I also send a special shout out to my sister for all of her encouragement and for always pointing out the light at the end of the tunnel. Thank you to my parents for their love and support, especially the beautiful computer they bought me so I could write this thesis.

Above all, I am grateful for the people in my life and appreciative of their support. If I could speak a hundred different languages, I would say thank you in each, but I just know two. Thank you, and Muchas gracias!

*I Corinthians 13:8-13*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	1
Statement of the Problem .....	4
Purpose and Objectives .....	6
Scope of the Study .....	8
Assumptions of the Study .....	8
Limitations of the Study .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	9
Summary .....	9
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE .....	11
Preparedness of Graduates for Employment .....	11
State of the Economy/Shrinking Pool of Workers .....	13
Skills Employers Seek in Prospective Employees .....	13
Skills Gained from International Experiences .....	16
Value of Learning a Foreign Language .....	21
Communicating Skills from International Experiences to Employers .....	23
Action Steps for Businesses, Government and Institutions to Support International Initiatives .....	24
Summary .....	29
III. METHODOLOGY .....	30
Institutional Review Board .....	31
Population .....	31
Instrumentation .....	31
Research Design & Procedure .....	32
Assumptions .....	32
Limitations .....	33
Data Analysis .....	33
Summary .....	35

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS.....	36
Findings Related to Objective One.....	37
Findings Related to Objective Two .....	40
Findings Related to Objective Three .....	42
Findings Related to Objective Four .....	44
Findings Related to Objective Five.....	46
Findings Related to Objective Six .....	48
Findings Related to Objective Seven.....	50
Findings Related to Objective Eight .....	52
Summary .....	52
V. CONCLUSION.....	54
Summary .....	54
Summary of the Review of Literature .....	55
Summary of the Methodology .....	55
Population .....	56
Conclusions Related to Objective One .....	56
Conclusions Related to Objective Two.....	57
Conclusions Related to Objective Three.....	58
Conclusions Related to Objective Four .....	60
Conclusions Related to Objective Five.....	62
Conclusions Related to Objective Six.....	66
Conclusions Related to Objective Seven .....	66
Conclusions Related to Objective Eight .....	67
Recommendations.....	67
Recommendations for Practice .....	67
Recommendations for Research .....	69
REFERENCES .....	70
APPENDICES .....	73
Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Approval Form.....	73
Appendix B: Employer Consent Form .....	75
Appendix C: The Survey Instrument .....	77
Appendix D: Employer Comments from Survey Instrument .....	84

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1 <i>Time Schedule (2008) Gantt Chart</i> .....	32
2 <i>Employers' perceptions of the importance of study abroad and/or international experiences</i> .....	38
3 <i>Employers' perceptions of the personal qualities of prospective employees employers value the most</i> .....	39
4 <i>Employers' perceptions of the skills of prospective employees employers value the most</i> .....	40
5 <i>Employers' perceptions of the qualities that study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students</i> .....	42
6 <i>Employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees</i> .....	43
7 <i>Employers' perceptions of the value of foreign language skills</i> .....	44
8 <i>Ranking of how employers' perceived the personal qualities of prospective employees</i> .....	50
9 <i>Ranking of how employers' perceived the skills of prospective employees</i> .....	51
10 <i>A comparison between the personal qualities employers seek in prospective employees and how employers perceive study abroad and international experiences develop those qualities</i> .....	53
11 <i>A comparison between the skills employers seek in prospective employees and how employers perceive study abroad and international experiences develop those skills</i> .....	54

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background

Many young people in the world today have a very limited view and lack of knowledge of the world (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study*, 2006). “Far too many lack even the most basic skills for navigating the international economy or understanding the relationships among people and places that provide critical context for world events” (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study*, 2006). In fact, “in our era, citizenship is global, and so is knowledge” (Ungar, 2008, p. 8). It is essential that everyone come together, including government, institutions, universities, to “bring young Americans up to speed” (Ungar, 2008, p. 8).

Because students who were born after 1982, called millennials according to Neil Howe and William Strauss, the authors of *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (2000), have grown up overprogrammed and overprotected, they have been protected from risk and failure (Curran, 2007). It also means they have not been able to “create their own paths to success” (p. 49). Study abroad and international experiences give millennials the opportunity to stretch their boundaries to improve the areas that employers will be stereotyping them as lacking (Curran, 2007).

According to Bailey Norwood and Shida Henneberry (2006), the majority of college students choose to concentrate their time on a few activities that they think will give them the biggest payoff. From trying to achieve a perfect grade point average to serving as an officer in a club or organization, there are many different activities that undergraduates students can pursue (Norwood & Henneberry, 2006). Many students believe that a study abroad or international experience will give them an advantage in

their careers, and study abroad offices will often endorse study abroad and international experiences as a career advantage (Curran, 2007).

An international experience can give students the opportunity to gain the skills and qualities that employers seek in prospective employees (Curran, 2007). These skills according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers range from analytical skills to interpersonal skills. However, students can gain these skills and qualities in several different ways, not just through study abroad (Curran, 2007). For example, a student can learn teamwork skills, a skill that employers from the NACE survey rate as very important, by working on a project in a lab with another student (Curran, 2007). Yet, students can also learn teamwork skills during a study abroad by planning a field trip (Curran, 2007). Curran (2007) uses this example to show that “study abroad experiences can show a degree of complexity” in relation to projects inside the classroom of a home university (p. 49).

The Survey of Geographic Literacy (2006) categorized young Americans as between the ages of 18 and 24 and demonstrated that young Americans are not consistently able to identify countries and significant natural landmarks around the world. Of those surveyed, seventy-four percent believe English, not Mandarin Chinese, is the most commonly spoken native language in the world (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study*, 2006). Also, seventy-three percent do not know that the majority of Indonesia is Muslim making Indonesia the largest Muslim country in the world.

Furthermore, the results of the Survey of Geographic Literacy (2006) demonstrated that most young Americans do not have substantial contact with people or other cultures outside of the United States (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study*, 2006). Seventy percent of those surveyed had not traveled abroad at all in the past three years. Only twenty-two percent had a passport, and an overwhelming eighty-nine percent do not regularly correspond with anyone outside of the United States. On the topic of foreign languages, six out of ten of the survey participants could not speak a foreign language fluently, and only fourteen percent believed it was “absolutely necessary” to be able to speak a second language (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy*



*Study*, 2006, p. 7). Even more striking, only half report that being able to locate countries in the news is “important but not absolutely necessary” (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study*, 2006, p. 6).

According to William Brustein (2007), it is necessary for colleges and universities to help students become globally competent. Darla Deardorff (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006) defined intercultural competence from her research as “the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes” (p.73). Different attitudes and skills that make up intercultural competence were identified from this research. The attitudes include: “openness, respect (valuing all cultures), curiosity and discovery (tolerating ambiguity)” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 74). The skills included: “to analyze, interpret and relate as well as skills to listen and observe” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 74). “Cognitive skills emerged including comparative thinking skills and cognitive flexibility” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 74). “These skills seem to focus primarily on communication and behavior in intercultural situations and point to the importance of process in acquiring intercultural competence and the attention that needs to be paid to developing these critical skills” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 74). All of the intercultural experts from Deardorff’s study agreed that “the understanding of others’ world views” is an essential part of intercultural competence (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006).

While Deardorff’s research focused on intercultural competence, William Hunter studied global competence. As defined by Hunter’s research, global competence is “having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one’s environment” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 74). Having an open attitude was recognized as part of global competence along with developing a “nonjudgemental” attitude (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 75). Also, recognizing that “one’s worldview is not universal was a primary attitude necessary to become globally competent” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 75). “Skills necessary to become globally competent included active participation on project-oriented academic or vocational experiences with people from other cultures and traditions, the ability to live outside

one's own culture, and the ability to assess intercultural performance in social or business settings" (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 75).

"Confronted with a world that is strikingly different from what it was just a decade ago, the United States faces rapidly shifting economic, political, and national security realities and challenges," notes Brustein (2007, p. 382). Thomas Friedman (2004) suggests that global competence of U.S. citizens is important to the economy of the United States. The United States needs to be more ambitious in order to stay competitive in the global marketplace (Friedman, 2006). Without knowledge of other cultures, companies based in the United States are unlikely to be successful in understanding local consumer tastes (Friedman, 2004).

Some companies place such a high level of importance on skills, such as global competence and cultural understanding, that they are creating programs for their own employees to go abroad. This new trend allows employees to experience life outside of their comfort zone (Deutsch, 2008). International Business Machines (IBM) is one of the companies taking up this new trend, by creating a program called Corporate Service Corps that allows employees to gain experience overseas.

According to *The New York Times*, management experts believe that IBM has found an important aspect of developing employees (Deutsch, 2008). It is vital that employees are aware of differences in cultures and values, especially when the employees are interacting with people from different cultures and/or countries. Additionally, going to a foreign place and experiencing a different area or culture allows a person to grow as a leader. As Claudia Deutsch (March 26, 2008) shows, just because you are a leader inside of your own area or comfort zone does not mean that a person knows how to be a good leader outside of that area or comfort zone.

### Statement of the Problem

Despite an increasing need for global awareness and competence, only one percent of the 19 million enrolled college students in the United States study abroad (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). According to the study abroad report at Oklahoma State University, 469 students from OSU studied abroad between August 1, 2007 and July 31, 2008 (OSU Study Abroad Office, 2008). For enrollment of Fall 2007, there were 26,998

undergraduates, 4,391 graduates, and 654 professional students enrolled at OSU ("OSU Facts and Stats," 2007). The 469 students who studied abroad out of the 32,043 total enrolled students represent just over one percent of the total enrolled population at OSU. The total number of OSU students who studied abroad includes reciprocal exchange, National Student Exchange, and affiliated/approved programs organized by the OSU study abroad office, and college/school-based, faculty-led programs coordinated by individual colleges and schools (OSU Study Abroad Office, 2008). It also reflects a small decrease of about one percent from the previous year of students from OSU studying abroad.

Oklahoma State University has set a long-term goal of having all students participate in a study abroad experience (*OSU Accelerates Study Abroad Efforts; Sets Long-Term Goal of 100% Participation*). The short-term goal is to reach 25 percent of the students studying abroad in five years. However, study abroad at OSU is down one percent from 2006-2007 (OSU Study Abroad Office, 2008). In addition, Stevan Trooboff, Michael Vande Berg, and Jack Rayman (2007) cite in their article *Employer Attitudes toward Study Abroad* that study abroad has been questioned in relation to its relevance toward employability. "Students should be alerted to the fact that studying abroad can both hurt and help a career, depending on how they approach their experience" (Curran, 2007, p. 52). This, according to Curran (2007), makes it important for students to take their study abroad experiences seriously.

Most of the study abroad experiences that students participated in at OSU are college/school-based, faculty-led programs. In fact 72 percent of the total study abroad numbers are these types of trips. These study abroad experiences are short-term, ranging from two to six weeks long. According to the OSU Study Abroad Report (2008), this reflects a national trend. It also means that if students want to take their study abroad experience seriously they need to take extra steps to prepare before they leave for their trip (Curran, 2007). Students can do this by taking advanced language courses in the language of the country, taking a history or sociology course that is about the region of the study abroad, or reading newspapers and magazines from the country (Curran, 2007). Students can also take the initiative during their study abroad or international experience to communicate with people from the country (Curran, 2007).

Katerina Kratochvilova, student exchange advisor for the OSU Study Abroad and National Student Exchange Office, believes that most students from OSU go abroad to get the experience, travel and learn a language (Personal Communication, September 26, 2008). As a student exchange advisor, Kratochvilova works with students to choose study abroad programs, fill out the appropriate paperwork, work with partnering universities, and to help ensure that students receive the appropriate academic credit for their study abroad experience. According to Kratochvilova, study abroad is important beyond learning about another country or foreign language because it helps students learn to be more resourceful and independent (Personal Communication, September 26, 2008).

If the United States is to stay competitive in the global marketplace with employees who are globally competent, then there needs to be a way to create employees who have those skills. If gaining international experience translates into global competence, then the students who take advantage of opportunities to travel and learn about the world outside of the United States have a start at being more globally competent. “The skills that form the foundation of global competence include the ability to work effectively in international settings; awareness of and adaptability to diverse cultures, perceptions, and approaches; familiarity with the major currents of global change and the issues they raise; and the capacity for effective communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries” (Brustein, 2007, p. 383). As in the aforementioned IBM example, some companies are sending their own employees abroad to gain new experiences and skills (Deutsch, 2008). If a person can gain those skills at a university through a study abroad, is that reflected in the hiring decisions of companies and organizations?

### Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university students during the hiring process. This researcher desired to understand what, if any, importance employers place on international experiences, including study abroad trips, service learning programs abroad and international internships.

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the characteristics of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiters and recruiting organizations, including any study abroad experiences of the recruiters;
2. Determine how employers viewed different types of educational experiences, including study abroad and/or international experiences;
3. Determine which personal qualities of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
4. Determine which skills of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
5. Determine employers' perceptions of what qualities study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students;
6. Determine employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees;
7. Determine what, if any, value employers placed on foreign language skills; and
8. Discover if so, and then how often, employers ask students about their study abroad and/or international experiences during formal interviews.

The goal of this study was to determine the level of importance an international experience is for new and recent college and university graduates during the hiring process. As of November 2007, the total number of American students studying abroad has increased 8.5 percent from the previous year to a total of 223,534 students participating (*American Students Studying Abroad at Record Levels: Up 8.5%, 2007*). Yet, the total number of students studying abroad still remains very low. While the percentage of students studying abroad has increased, only one percent of total students study abroad each year (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). The increase of American students participating in study abroad experiences can be attributed to the recognition, by both students and educators, that an international experience is valuable in relation to the future careers of students (*American Students Studying Abroad at Record Levels: Up 8.5%, 2007*). According to Curran (2007), “any study abroad experience can potentially

provide a career benefit. It is up to colleges and universities to make sure that the students who receive such a benefit are not the exception, but the rule” (p. 52).

### Scope of the Study

The scope of this study was limited to the set of employers who attended the OSU Business Career Fair on September 16, 2008. This population contained 149 employers.

### Assumptions of the Study

The following assumptions were made in this study:

1. The employers provided honest responses to the survey.
2. It is assumed that employers look for specific characteristics in their potential employees that would demonstrate a certain level of success the employee would achieve if hired.
3. It is also assumed that the work culture of the organization of the employer encourages success and wants employees who would demonstrate the characteristics that lead to success.

### Limitations of the Study

The study included the following limitations:

1. The biases of the employers will limit this research study. Employers may have personal feelings toward international experiences due to their own experiences or lack thereof with people from different cultures and nations and also from their own experiences abroad, and this may skew their feelings about study abroad experiences more positively or negatively. Someone who has studied abroad and had a positive experience may feel that college students should make studying abroad a priority in college. Someone who did not feel compelled to study in another country as a student or did study abroad with negative outcomes may feel it is not necessary to go abroad.
2. While international experiences may allow students to gain and/or increase several skills that employers desire in new and recent university and college students, such as communication skills or the ability to adapt well to new

situations, there are other ways to gain these skills beyond participating in a study abroad or international experience. This has to be taken into consideration when determining which skills employers require when hiring new and recent college and university students.

### Significance of the Study

The results of the study are important in determining the value of international experiences to both students and their potential employers and in guiding universities in how to best prepare their graduates for employment. Also, it is important in identifying what employability skills are developed from international experiences and factors that prospective employees need to communicate to employers. According to a poll released by the National Leadership Council for Liberal Education and America's Promise, 63 percent of employees are not prepared to enter the workforce and be successful in today's global economy ("Two-Thirds of Employers Say Graduates Lack Essential Skills, Concludes Association of American Colleges & Universities Initiative," 2007).

Oklahoma State University eventually wants all of its students to have a "significant study abroad experience" (*OSU Accelerates Study Abroad Efforts; Sets Long-Term Goal of 100% Participation*,). Along with this objective, the Oklahoma legislature passed a resolution, which supports institutions of higher education to encourage international education and the programs that support it ("House Concurrent Resolution," 2007). With these current goals set in Oklahoma, it is imperative to understand if there is a correlation between international experience and employability.

### Summary

Chapter I supplied the background and the need to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university graduates. It demonstrated the lack of knowledge most 18 to 24 year-old Americans have about other nations and cultures and the benefits these experiences can offer students. It also demonstrated the value of this research in how it relates to the study abroad goals at OSU and in the state of Oklahoma. It also provided the problem statement, purpose and

objectives, scope of the study, assumptions of the study, limitations of the study, and significance of the study.



## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of literature has seven sections that address the background of how employers view the study abroad and/or international experiences of college and university graduates. It outlines the associated aspects of how employers view different skills, including those that are related to study abroad and/or international experiences. The first section outlines how prepared graduates are for employment. The second section addresses the state of the economy in relation to a shrinking pool of workers. The third and fourth sections outline the skills employers seek in prospective employees, including new and recent graduates, and the skills students gain from study abroad and/or international experiences. The fifth and sixth sections address the value of learning a foreign language and how to communicate skills gained from study abroad and/or international experiences to potential employers. The seventh section addresses how businesses, government and institutions can support international initiatives. Finally, the summary reviews the research and the value of skills gained from study abroad and/or international experiences.

#### Preparedness of Graduates for Employment

The results of the study of employers in America in *Are They Really Ready to Work?* show that American graduates are not prepared enough to enter the workforce and perform successfully and up to the standards of employers (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). “Majorities of employers and recent college graduates believe that an undergraduate college education should provide a balance of a well-rounded education and knowledge and skills in a specific field” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc.,

2006, p. 3). If students graduate and are not prepared, it puts them at a disadvantage compared to the students who are prepared, and the unprepared graduate will face the challenge of playing catch up to match the level of the students who are prepared (Donham, 2007). Both employers and recent graduates place global issues in the “top six areas in which they believe that today’s colleges and universities should place more emphasis” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 8). The issue of global awareness is an increasingly important issue, and students need to be aware of cultures and people different from their own (Donham, 2007). “Our graduates now face national and international competition for the jobs that were in many cases, once considered local. Once employed, our graduates will likely be working with colleagues from vastly different educational, cultural, and social backgrounds” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 72).

“Fully 63% of business executives interviewed agreed that too many recent college graduates do not have the skills to be successful in today’s global economy” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 6). According to a survey of employers by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2006), over fifty percent of employers believe that college and university graduates are “very well prepared in the following areas: succeeding in entry-level jobs at their company; advancing within their company; and contributing to the innovation of their company’s products and services” (p. 7).

However, the focus groups that were included with the research of Peter D. Hart Associates, Inc. (2006) found that is a challenge for employers to find potential hires that are qualified with “both the specific job/technical skills and the broader skills (communication skills, teamwork skills, problem-solving skills, and work ethic) necessary to promise greater success for both the individual and their employer” (Peter D. Hart Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 7). “International knowledge, language abilities and intercultural communications skills” are the skills that are going to be demanded of graduates in the future (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006, p.26). “Whether through curriculum, education abroad, extra curricular activities, campus collaborations, or innovative partnerships, it is crucial that institutions include the preparation of globally ready students as part of their strategic plan” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 81).

### State of the Economy/Shrinking Pool of Workers

Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) report that America is in a shortage of available workers, and it is getting even smaller. According to Carnevale, Gainer, and Meltzer, the source of new workers is also shrinking (1990, p. 24). As a result, employers are going to have to recruit less-qualified workers in order to fill entry-level positions (Carnevale, Gainer, & Meltzer, 1990). Carnevale et al. (1990) also predict that there will be a shortage of “well-educated and trained American workers looking for their first jobs” (p. 24).

With the shrinkage of a pool of new employees to choose from, employers’ interest in training employees rather than replacing them is increasing. Because employees want to advance in their careers and are interested in transitioning between jobs, their interest in training is also increasing (Carnevale et al., 1990). Employers want to improve the skills that are increasingly lacking in the employees because of the employer’s economic concern. When employees do not perform to the expectations of their employers and it is affecting productivity, employers respond with training and replacement (Carnevale et al., 1990). When employees have not performed up to the standards in the past, they have been replaced. Carnevale et al. (1990) describes the most devastating impact of these deficiencies as hurting people who are already at a disadvantage. The people struggling to enter the workforce and attempting to gain well-paying work are not able to climb up the economic ladder (Carnevale et al., 1990). Even with some employers willing to train employees, there are others who cannot afford to do so (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006).

### Characteristics Employers Seek in Prospective Employees

The nature of the workplace is changing, and along with that change, the skills that employees need to be successful in the workplace are also changing. This phenomenon is taking place concurrently with the changing skill sets that graduates need. College graduates are going to need to be able to “understand and acquire new and different skills quickly” according to Carnevale et al. (1990, p. 24). Graduates are also going to need a broad set of skills in order to meet the goals of their employers (Carnevale et al., 1990).

Employers are looking for soft skills and not just technical knowledge (Crebert, 2004). Skills such as reading, writing and computation have been inadequate in the past. Most employers still require the basic skills of reading, writing and computation, but there are more skills that are being needed. While the majority of workers in the United States can read, write and compute, employees have problems transferring these skills to the workplace (Carnevale et al., 1990). Employees interact with other people through oral and written communication, which makes these skills important in the workplace. According to Carnevale et al. (1990) “job success is strongly linked to good communication skills. In fact recent studies indicate that only job knowledge ranks above communication skills as a factor in workplace success” (p. 27).

More and more entry-level position workers are being expected to make decisions at all points of production, and the ability to apply a wide range of skills is being required of entry-level workers as well as supervisors and managers (Carnevale et al., 1990). However, in Norwood and Henneberry’s (2006) survey of employers in the agricultural industry, the employers recognized that a “candidate’s character, passion and dedication toward career goal, and internship/experience relevant to the job” were very important (p. 491).

Carnevale et al. (1990) describes problem solving as the “ability to recognize and define problems, to invent and implement solutions, and to track and evaluate results” (p.27). The other characteristics that are needed in today’s workforce of employees are creative thinking, self-esteem, motivation, goal setting and employability/career development (Carnevale et al., 1990). According to Carnevale et al. (1990), employees who demonstrate these skills “increase their value in the workplace and the marketplace” (p. 27). Carnevale et al. (1990) also noted that skills such as problem solving, listening, negotiating and knowing how to learn are increasingly “being viewed as essentials in short supply” (p. 25).

Working in teams has been linked to high productivity and product quality so employers are looking for employees who can work effectively with others (Carnevale et al., 1990). The quality of interpersonal skills, focused negotiation and purposeful teamwork defines and controls working relationships, which are needed for high productivity and product quality. Organizational effectiveness and leadership are also

skills that are needed of employees at all levels of the organization's hierarchy (Carnevale et al., 1990). These are the skills Carnevale et al. (1990) cites as being important to success in the workplace: oral and written communication, listening, creative thinking and problem solving, self-esteem, motivation, goal setting, employability/career development, team work, organizational, and leadership.

With all of the skills that Carnevale et al. (1990) cites as being important in the workplace, there are other attributes to consider during the hiring process. Students and employers were surveyed in Norwood and Henneberry's research to find important attributes during the hiring process according to the employer's willingness-to-pay. While students ranked multiple language skills as the second most important attribute, employers ranked it sixth (Norwood & Henneberry, 2006). This demonstrates that there is sometimes a disparity in what attributes employer's value in candidates and in the attributes new and recent graduates believe employer's value. Also of interest, GPA and awards are noted as being the least important items, according to employers (Norwood & Henneberry, 2006).

According to Crebert (2004) graduates are in need of a broad set of skills and an inter-cultural awareness in order to compete in the work place. Graduates find themselves in areas different from their original areas of study, and graduates often move between fields rather within fields (Crebert, 2004). Transition between school and work usually brings "insecurity and unease" (Crebert, 2004, p. 48). Graduates not meeting employers' expectations usually results in employers' blaming universities for not preparing students for the workforce (Crebert, 2004). It is assumed that their lack of readiness for the workforce means that they lack the skills needed to be successful (Crebert, 2004).

Crebert (2004) noted that teamwork skills are important and that students need to be in situations where they are forced out of their comfort zones to grow rather than in traditional training and classroom settings. A survey of employers from Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2006) shows that employers value teamwork skills, critical thinking and analytical reasoning skills, and communication skills the most. Of the seven skills that Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2006) tested, "teamwork skills and the ability to collaborate with others in a diverse group is the ability that employers value most when seeking to hire new employees" (p. 5). For students to gain these soft skills,

Crebert (2004) noted that survey responses demonstrated that they need to be given responsibilities. Graduates need to move to “self-reflective learning after graduation” (Crebert, 2004, p. 65).

The National Association of Colleges and Employers 2007 employer survey listed verbal and written communication skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, computer skills, and analytical skills as the skills employers seek in new graduates (Curran, 2007). Employers did not highly rate cross-cultural competency or linguistic ability, but Curran (2007) predicts that these skills will become more and more important in the global world and that students who fluently know more than one language will be in high demand. Honesty/Integrity, motivation, initiative, strong work ethic, flexibility/adaptability, and detail oriented are the abilities that employers rate as most desirable (Curran, 2007).

Both applied skills and basic knowledge are necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). The most important skills noted from the study include professionalism/work ethic, oral and written communications, teamwork/collaboration, and critical thinking/problem solving. Diversity was also noted as one of the applied skills in the study. According to the results from *Are They Really Ready to Work?* (2006), “foreign languages will ‘increase in importance’ in the next five years, more than any other basic skills, according to over 60 percent (63.3 percent) of the employer respondents” (p. 10). An important deficiency for two- and four-year college graduates were reported in leadership (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). In terms of preparation for the work force in entry-level positions, 23.9 percent of four-year college graduates and 10.3 percent of two-year college graduates are reported are rated as excellent (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

#### Characteristics Gained from International Experiences

One belief is that employers are looking for graduates with a global perspective (Stuart, 2007). Most employers want college and university graduates who have been educated in “global issues and developments and their implications for the future and the role of the United States in the world” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 2). However, Kaufman & Johnson (2006) cite that the people who make hiring decisions are not concerned if a student has international experience but that they should be

concerned. There are several avenues to encouraging students to participate in study abroad trips or international experiences.

An experience abroad, whether short-term or long-term, has a significant impact on a person who has lived inside the United States for his or her entire life (Ungar, 2008). The way a student thinks is affected by an international experience, even a short-term experience abroad (Ungar, 2008). “Nothing helps people – all people, but especially young people – understand the complexities of daily life on this planet better than an international experience, even a brief one” (Ungar, 2008, p. 7). Brustein (2007) also believes that proficiency in a foreign language is an essential part of being globally competent (p. 390).

Employers value several personal qualities that are related to study abroad, and they value an even greater number of skills that are related to intercultural and global competence (Trooboff, Berg, & Rayman, 2007). Trooboff, Berg, and Rayman (2007) found that three of the four highest rated skills on their employer survey were skills that met the intercultural and global criteria used in their survey. Employers ranked the personal qualities in the survey, which were adapted from NACE, higher than the personal qualities associated with study abroad objectives and learning outcomes. For personal qualities associated with intercultural and global criteria, employers placed the most value on listening and observing well and the ability to be flexible and adapt to change well (Trooboff et al., 2007). The personal qualities that employers placed the most value on were not directly tied to any intercultural or global criteria. These personal qualities were: showing honesty and integrity, showing a strong work ethic, and being self-motivated and showing initiative (Trooboff et al., 2007). It is evident from this research that the employers surveyed place significant value on study abroad and international experiences (Trooboff et al., 2007). Yet, employers also indicated during the same research that they do not strongly and steadily believe that study abroad and international experiences enhance these skills and qualities.

In an interview with Loveland, the president of Wheaton College and co-chair of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), Ronald A. Crutcher, reviewed the outcomes that the LEAP National Leadership Council found for reforming liberal education. He stated, “Intercultural knowledge competency is crucial for students

graduating from college in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Loveland, 2007, p. 19). He believes working effectively, as part of a team, will make a person successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that some of the individuals that students will interact with will come from “very different cultural beliefs and backgrounds” (Loveland, 2007, p. 19). These learning outcomes are also similar to the skills that employers seek in recent graduates (Loveland, 2007). In the LEAP survey, it was found that thinking critically, problem solving and working as a team are important skills for students to learn during their time in higher education (Loveland, 2007).

In different research where surveys were sent to American students who had spent the year on their home campus and also to students who had spent the year abroad at a European university, it was found that the students who had spent the year abroad showed “increased levels of international political concern, cross-cultural interest, and cultural cosmopolitanism for the study abroad group” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). In addition, the students from the group that had studied abroad demonstrated more “positive, yet also more critical attitudes toward their own country than did the comparison group” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988).

Also of interest, the findings showed that women and humanities majors were “higher in cross-cultural interest prior to as well as after the junior year abroad” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). This suggests that for these sets of students the study abroad experience did not have an “equalizing effect” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). “These students started higher and ended higher” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). Females were also higher on the cultural cosmopolitanism dimension than their male counterparts; likewise, “humanities and social and behavioral science majors were higher than majors in the biological and physical sciences” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988).

The results of Carlson and Widaman’s research shows that study abroad “can be an important contributor to international awareness and potentially contribute to attitudes and behaviors that help foster international understanding” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). Even short-term trips abroad can reap many benefits. “Most students in short term trips abroad are deeply moved by their experiences” (Lenz & Wister, 2008). According to Herrin (2004), education abroad has been noted by government figures as important in addressing the need of an educated workforce in the United States. Policy makers in the



United States understand that an education abroad is important to advancing cross-cultural knowledge (Herrin, 2004).

The U.S. Department of Education recognizes the importance of study abroad for students, colleges and universities, and America ("Study Abroad: Enhancing International and Area Studies Education," 2005). According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are many skills that students can learn through international experiences ("Study Abroad: Enhancing International and Area Studies Education," 2005). Some of these skills include "critical thinking skills, the ability to communicate in more than one language, the ability to communicate across cultural and national boundaries, and the ability to make informed judgments on major personal and social issues based on the analysis of various perspectives" ("Study Abroad: Enhancing International and Area Studies Education," 2005). The U.S. Department of Education also cites studying abroad as encouraging personal growth, development and maturity among participants. Changing the way students are educated in the U.S. can help change the reputation of Americans as ignorant of and insensitive toward other cultures (Ashwill, 2004). "Individuals are unlikely to become successful mediators of their and other cultures unless they develop positive attitudes toward the culture which is brought into relation to their own. Further work should be aimed at assessing in detail how such attitudes develop" (Carlson & Widaman, 1988).

"The link between having the highest quality workforce and staying competitive in the new global arena is undeniable. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) of CEOs who report having difficulty finding qualified workers in the U.S. also rate global competitiveness as 'very' or 'most' important" (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006, p. 43). Having a broad range of skills is also important according to this study because recent college graduates are frequently assigned to different projects or to perform different duties in different areas. According to the research by Peter D. Hart Associates, Inc. (2006), employers have the most frustration with trying to find new and recent college and university graduates that are skilled in a variety of areas, including both the technical and the non-technical skill sets.

International experiences give students the ability to learn and enhance skills that will allow them to succeed in a global economy ("Study Abroad: Enhancing International

and Area Studies Education," 2005). It also prepares students to be better citizens, who can be more competitive in the economy and can understand politics. This helps to secure national interests and security because citizens are able to react in the proper manner to political instability, which includes terrorism. Just as Crutcher, the president of Wheaton College and co-chair of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP), stated in his interview with Loveland (2007) that students needed to do more than just study abroad, Ashwill (2004) also noted that a study abroad experience does not give students real-world experience. The students often live with each other and take classes from their own professors (Loveland, 2007). Therefore, students are not gaining cross-cultural competence by just participating in certain types of study abroad experiences (Ashwill, 2004). The student has to work to gain a different perspective and to broaden their cultural understanding (Curran, 2007).

Yet, William Lenz and Joseph Wister (2008) cite several benefits that are gained from short-term study abroad, faculty-led trips. They argue that long-term study abroad experiences are too expensive for many students, especially since some students are first-generation college students that are not expected to study abroad (Lenz & Wister, 2008). With the experience of leading these short-term experiences, Lenz and Wister (2008) found repeating patterns in the essays by students. Lenz and Wister (2008) report that, "a sense of surviving a set of challenges was very important" (p. 85). Even when students are not confronted with a cross-cultural experience that is directly related to the place they are traveling, the students are interacting with other students in their group, which provides a unique opportunity for students to share and learn from each other (Lenz & Wister, 2008). Other benefits of short-term study abroad trips include personal growth, "developing personal coping strategies," and learning to "come to terms with anxiety and self doubt" (Lenz & Wister, 2008).

While employers report that international competence is important, that is not reflected in their hiring and promotion decisions (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). However, a 2006 survey from the Council on International Education Exchange showed the people who hire graduates expressed more support for those who studied abroad than previously believed ("Employers Weigh In on Value of Education Abroad," 2007). This survey also showed that employers believe the study abroad experiences with the most value are

those that are the longest and that employers place more value on learning, which features service learning and internships ("Employers Weigh In on Value of Education Abroad," 2007).

Troboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) found that employers value study abroad experiences with increasingly greater value related to the length of the program. It was also found that employers greatly value service learning, which can be an internship or other type of experiential learning (Trooboff et al., 2007). Kaufman and Johnson (2006) report study abroad as the means to gaining important skills such as international knowledge, language skills, and intercultural communication skills. They also believe businesses should support programs that foster this kind of development in students (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). "The next generation must leave the country... and come back with their minds open to the world" (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006, p. 26).

#### Value of Learning a Foreign Language

While more students are taking foreign language classes, there are not very many who obtain the full level of fluency (Ashwill, 2004). Right now most education systems are set up to teach foreign language courses while teachers and administrators hope that students will want to further their own education and strive to become fluent and understand other cultures (Ashwill, 2004). There is more to gaining cross-cultural competence than just taking foreign language courses. In fact, students "overestimate the returns to multiple language skills" (Norwood & Henneberry, 2006). Skills based on awareness, knowledge, and practice are all necessary for gaining cross-cultural competence (Ashwill, 2004).

In a survey called "What Makes a Successful Career Professional in an International Organization," foreign language was ranked 19<sup>th</sup> while cross-cultural competence was ranked 5<sup>th</sup> (Ashwill, 2004). This is because competency in a language does not necessarily equate to having functional skills that demonstrate cross-cultural competence in a real-world setting (Ashwill, 2004). For example, just because you know the words to say in another language does not mean that you know how to effectively communicate your message or how to get along well with a person from a different culture.

When Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2006) researched the skills that employers value in hiring new employees, foreign language proficiency was the last skill out of the seven tested that employers value in new hires. Only three percent of employers chose foreign language proficiency when asked to pick the top two skills out of seven available. Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. (2006) interprets that the survey does not prove that proficiency in a foreign language is unimportant to employers. It is just one of the skills ranked as “lower priorities when it comes to what they are looking for in new employees” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 5).

Also of interest from the same survey but with recent graduates, when asked to pick the top two skills out of the seven available, recent graduates ranked foreign language proficiency second to last (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006). Six percent of recent graduates chose foreign language proficiency as the most important skill or ability. The ability to work with numbers/statistics was ranked last in the survey with recent graduates.

In another survey of employers, almost half of the respondents selected “Use of Non-English Languages as Tool for Understanding Other Nations, Markets, and Cultures” and “Demonstrate Understanding of Global Markets and the Economic and Cultural Impacts of Globalization” as emerging content areas that will be the most significant in the near future (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006, p.49). “In follow-up interviews, several individuals emphasized the importance of knowing *Foreign Languages* and understanding other cultures and their relevance in global work environments” (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006, p. 49). Many employers responded with comments about having businesses locations in other countries, being a global company, and traveling to other countries.

Both Kaufman and Johnson (2006) and Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) recognize the importance of language abilities. International knowledge and intercultural communication skills are valuable abilities (Kaufman and Johnson, 2006). These are skills that college graduates need to gain during their experience at a college or university because employers lack the resources and time to teach these skills (Kaufman and Johnson, 2006). Also, Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) found that the greater the company or organization’s internationally generated revenue, the more likely

that the employees of the company or organization value all kinds of study abroad programs. In fact, companies and organizations that do business internationally value second language skills (Trooboff et al., 2007).

#### Communicating Skills from International Experiences to Employers

An international experience is not equivalent with a career advantage (Curran, 2007). It is also not equivalent with creating “global-ready graduates” (Deardorff & Hunter, 2006, p. 81). Curran (2007) reports that while students think their international experiences will benefit them with attracting potential employers and gaining skills such as cultural understanding or a different language, these benefits do not just automatically happen by going to a different country. While these experiences or skills listed on a résumé will attract employers, students need to know how to express these skills and make them functional in an interview (Curran, 2007).

Many employers fail to ask students about study abroad or international experiences during an interview (Trooboff et al., 2007). This makes it even more vital for students to understand how important it is for them to speak about their experiences abroad during interviews and other networking opportunities with employers, whether the employer brings the topic up or not. In fact Trooboff, Vande Berg and Rayman (2007) believe that study abroad and career services professionals should work together to train students on how to communicate study abroad and international experiences to employers. It is common for someone who has been abroad to speak about the location or local culture, but it is more important for students to understand how to speak about more specific learning outcomes (Trooboff et al., 2007). Students who have studied abroad need to be specific about what they learned and the skills that they gained during their experience (Trooboff et al., 2007).

Employers place significance on the length of study abroad and international experiences (Trooboff et al., 2007). As the program length of a study abroad increases, so does the importance and relevance of the experience in the eyes of employers (Trooboff et al., 2007). This makes it even more important for students with short-term international experiences to justify their international experiences in a fashion where employers can understand the importance of the experience (Trooboff et al., 2007).

Students have to be able to translate their experience into the knowledge, skills, and abilities for which their potential employers are looking (Curran, 2007). Also, students should view their time abroad as a serious educational experience and not as play time (Curran, 2007). Students need to take the time to observe and reflect what goes on around them. Completing an internship overseas where a student could gain real-world experience and cultural understanding at the same time would be even more relevant to employers than just taking a class abroad (Curran, 2007). A student has to be able to set themselves apart from other applicants (Curran, 2007).

#### Action Steps for Businesses, Government & Institutions to Support International Initiatives

Government support is needed to encourage students to study abroad (Stuart, 2007). Another way is for businesses to financially support these experiences (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). It is hard for students to study abroad if they lack the resources to do so, and that is why it is important for colleges and universities, businesses and government to support study abroad programs (Stuart, 2007). In fact, Sanford Ungar (2008) believes that the government needs to take serious steps to fund international education for it to become a national priority. However, Karen Jenkins (2007) argues that study abroad is already a national policy. She cites the recommendation from the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (Jenkins, 2007). The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005) has a goal of one million students studying abroad each year by the year 2016-2017. There are more options than just relying on the government. “Partnerships are vital between colleges and universities and private organizations that provide international services” (Jenkins, 2007).

There is currently a bill called The Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2007 (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2008) in Congress. This bill was created using the recommendations from the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. If passed, the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act of 2007 will create the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation, a national program for study abroad that would make study abroad a part of

the undergraduate collegiate experience. This bill has been endorsed by “more than 40 higher education and educational exchange organizations” (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2008).

The goal of the bill, beyond creating the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation, is to develop Americans to be more informed about global issues (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2008). It would do so by “increasing participation in quality study abroad programs”, “encouraging diversity in student participation in study abroad”, “diversifying locations of study abroad, particularly in developing countries”, and by “making study abroad a cornerstone of today’s higher education” (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2008). According to the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program (2005), “promoting and democratizing undergraduate study abroad is the next step in the evolution of American higher education” (p. 3). As of September 24, 2008, the bill had not passed, but it is expected to be brought before Congress again before the end of the session (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2008).

“Even before September 11, international education was receiving increasing attention, with American colleges and universities adding global awareness and intercultural competencies to their mission statements and learning outcomes for general education. These efforts are intended to enhance the skills of college graduates in a global workforce, to enable students to participate in solutions to pressing global problems, and to promote global peace and understanding” (Altbach, 2002, p.29).

To prepare their graduates for the real world, Crutcher, the president of Wheaton College and co-chair of the Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP), believes that universities need to teach students “to connect their personal, cultural experience to that experience of others” (Loveland, 2007, p. 19). The objectives of a study abroad experience are “consistent with and complementary to the traditional goals of higher education” (Carlson & Widaman, 1988). Eighty-seven percent of employers believe that “America’s colleges and universities need to raise the quality of student achievement to ensure the United States remains competitive in the global economy” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 6). David Wheeler (2002) reported that there was no national policy on the issue of study abroad or international education for educational

institutions to follow. There was also no policy on how to “prepare students for a world in which countries are growing more interdependent.”

Yet, Crutcher wants to prepare students so that if they were dropped off anywhere in the world “they wouldn’t just survive but they would thrive” (Loveland, 2007, p. 19). “Seventy-three percent of employers think that the nation’s colleges and universities play a very important role in ensuring the United States’ ability to compete in the global economy, and another 22 percent feel they play a fairly important role” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p. 6). According to Crutcher, it is important for students to be comfortable hearing different languages and eating different food so that they will be comfortable no matter where they end up after they graduate (Loveland, 2007).

In order to gain international experience, Wheaton believes that students should not just study abroad in settings where professors come to them and the students are able to stay in comfort zones with people similar to them. Students need to intern abroad and to interact with people from that country (Loveland, 2007). It is also not just about studying abroad but immersing yourself in areas that are different from your own to gain an intercultural experience (Loveland, 2007). It is about stepping outside of your comfort zone.

However, the OSU Study Abroad Office concludes that more short-term study abroad experiences are needed (OSU Study Abroad Office, 2008). The OSU Study Abroad Office (2008) argues that these short-term programs meet the needs of students by fitting into their budgets and their academic schedules. This office also recommends incorporating study abroad into the curriculum at OSU and working harder to make scholarships available and study abroad experiences affordable to students. For the academic year of 2007-2008, \$329,650 of scholarship funding was awarded to students at OSU. Part of this funding came from the Provost’s Study Abroad Office Scholarship, which was awarded to 206 students.

In order to keep up with the changing global workforce, Wheaton College is implementing two pillars. The first pillar is connection, which means making connections between courses “from different fields with a common theme” (Loveland, 2007, p. 21). The second pillar includes integrating features such as race, ethnicity, class, gender and globalism into the curriculum (Loveland, 2007). They support intercultural learning and



want their students to make the “transition from student to working citizen when they graduate – wherever they choose to live” (Loveland, 2007, p. 21).

The recommendation from *Are They Really Ready to Work?* study is that academic institutions should incorporate more applied skills in their curriculum, because these are the skills that employers want (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

“Globalization and internationalization are now central issues for higher education worldwide” (Altbach, 2002, p.31). It is also recommended that businesses provided more opportunities and training for their employees to learn the skills that are lacking (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Yet Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) believe the results from their survey employers show that people who work in and with study abroad offices should make further progress in showing employers that studying abroad can produce the desired qualities and skills that employers want in recent graduates.

More research needs to be done on students studying abroad in order to better support the argument that study abroad produces students with the qualities and skills that employers are seeking in recent graduates (Trooboff et al., 2007). While employers recognize that they want graduates who have team building skills, employers do not connect that skill with a study abroad experience (Trooboff et al., 2007). If research is done that shows that study abroad increases and enhances students’ team building skills, then this will make study abroad more important in the eyes of employers (Trooboff et al., 2007). Then the next step is to share that research with people in study abroad and career services offices to show the effectiveness of certain kinds of study abroad programs (Trooboff et al., 2007).

It is necessary for the people who work in and with study abroad and career services offices to contemplate all of the different steps that they can take in order to improve how employers view study abroad and international experiences (Trooboff et al., 2007). Steps can be taken through research, the design of programs both on- and off-campus, and teaching students (Trooboff et al., 2007). This will give students who study abroad the opportunity to speak about their experiences in a way that relates to what employers value when hiring new and recent graduates.

In order to get American students participating in study abroad experiences that will be more beneficial to them in increasing their global competence and cross-cultural

skills, colleges and universities in the United States need to develop more options for students to study abroad for at least a semester (McMurtrie, 2007). “Educators also say students are more interested in service learning, which may be driving the push into developing countries” (McMurtrie, 2007).

The challenge for educational institutions and/ or study abroad offices is to provide programs that encourage the kind of learning that will lead to a career advantage. Educators and study abroad offices need to create study abroad programs that will teach and enhance the qualities and skills that employers seek in recent graduates (Trooboff et al., 2007). Students need to seriously prepare before they go on the experience and need to spend time observing and reflecting on their experience in order to make the most out of their international experience (Curran, 2007). They also need to learn to translate their skills to employers to make it a career advantage (Curran, 2007).

When students study abroad, most are gone for less than four months, which is not enough time to become fluent or to fully immerse yourself in a different culture (Curran, 2007). “The trend toward shorter trips is driven by a broad desire among educators to see more students spend at least a portion of their college careers outside the United States. Educators are troubled by the fact that even as the number of study-abroad students has risen steadily, the percentage of all college students who go abroad remains very low” (McMurtrie, 2007).

According to Shah, Sterrett, Chesser, and Wilmore (2001), companies are trying to encourage employees to stay with them by developing programs to train employees and to provide “long-term career paths” (p. 22). It is easier for employers to develop skills in their employees rather than attitudes and values (Shah, Sterrett, Chesser, & Wilmore, 2001). While American colleges and universities have advanced in recent years in integrating international and globalization components into their mission statements and policies, there is a lot more work that can be done to teach students important skills that they will need to be excellent global citizens and workers in the world (Altbach, 2002).

## Summary

The number of total students studying abroad remains low at the one percent level (Ashwill, 2004). Among those students who do study abroad, fewer than nine percent do so for a full academic year program (Ashwill, 2004). There are many variables that contribute to the overall study abroad experience including program quality and preparation (Ashwill, 2004).

In this day and age, it is critical that everyone in every sector regardless of gender, class, race, etc... learn how to adapt to new and/or different cultural situations (Ashwill, 2004). Real-world experience is needed in order to learn the skills that allow people to easily adapt to new cultural settings. Learning a new language is helpful and shows interest, but it is not enough when compared to real-world experience (Ashwill, 2004). While technical knowledge of the job is needed, other skills, some of which were also noted by Carnevale et al. (1990), are needed. These include teamwork and interpersonal skills, strategic international understanding and cross cultural experience (Ashwill, 2004).

“We need to ensure that U.S. students graduate from college with some minimal degree of knowledge of and sensitivity of the world” (Johnson & Mulholland, 2006, p. 5). While study abroad experiences may not be a direct way to increase a person’s chances of being employed (Trooboff et al., 2007), it does begin “a process of inculcating international sensitivity and of learning how to learn interculturally” (Johnson & Mulholland, 2006, p. 5).

*“If we are to achieve global competence at our institutions—and there is no excuse for not striving to attain this overall goal—it will require international educators in consultation with administrators, faculty, staff, and students to design and implement a curriculum that is comprehensive; coherent; accessible to all students; and has as its principal goal the ability to know, comprehend, analyze, and evaluate information in the context of an increasingly globalized world. If we miss this opportunity, we will surely fail to prepare our graduates for the enormous global challenges of the 21st century” (Brustein, 2007).*

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

Chapter I supplied the background and the need to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university graduates. It demonstrated the lack of knowledge most 18 to 24 year-old Americans have about other nations and cultures. It also demonstrated the value of this research in how it relates to the study abroad goals at OSU and in the state of Oklahoma. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university graduates. To achieve the purpose of this study, the specific objectives were to:

1. Describe the characteristics of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiters and recruiting organizations (employers), including any study abroad experiences of the recruiters;
2. Determine how employers viewed different types of educational experiences, including study abroad and/or international experiences;
3. Determine which personal qualities of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
4. Determine which skills of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
5. Determine employers' perceptions of what qualities study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students;
6. Determine employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees;

7. Determine what, if any, value employers placed on foreign language skills; and
8. Discover if so, and then how often, employers ask students about their study abroad and/or international experiences during formal interviews.

Chapter I included the problem statement, purpose and objectives, scope of the study, assumptions of the study, limitations of the study, and significance of the study.

Chapter II provided an analysis of how prepared new and recent graduates are for employment, the skills that employers look for in prospective employees, how a student could communicate an international experience effectively to an employer, how a college or university can support international initiatives, and a summary.

This chapter addresses the Institutional Review Board approval, population, instrumentation, research design and procedure, assumptions, limitations, data analysis, and summary.

#### Institutional Review Board

As required by OSU regulation, the research study was presented to the Office of University Research and the Institutional Review Board to ensure the rights and protection of human subjects as part of social science research. The study received approval for execution, and the IRB Application No. is GU0814.

#### Population

Participants in this study were from the convenience sample population of employers who attended the OSU Business Career Fair on September 16, 2008. The sample population contained 149 employers, as that is the number of employers who attended the career fair and received a survey. These employers are relevant to the study because their attendance at the OSU Business Career Fair signifies their interest in recruiting and hiring OSU students.

#### Instrumentation

A 19-question survey was used to gather data to identify the qualities, experiences and skills that employers value in hiring new and recent college and university students

(See Appendix C). The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey was adapted from a survey developed by Stevan Trooboff from the Council for International Educational Exchange, Michael Vande Berg from the Council for International Educational Exchange, and Jack Rayman from The Pennsylvania State University and published in *Employer Attitudes toward Study Abroad* in *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. The authors of the survey originally used the survey in an online format, and before the link was shared with their population of employers, letters from the directors of individual career services' offices were sent to employers to encourage their participation. In this study, a letter did not accompany the survey from the director of OSU Career Services, and paper copies of the surveys were used. An additional comments section was also included in the survey. The survey was used with permission from the authors.

#### Research Design & Procedure

This is a quantitative, relationship study to determine employers' feelings toward the value of international experiences to recent graduates. A survey was given to employers, and the results helped demonstrate how important employers value international experiences and on what skills they base their hiring decisions.

Because this study relates to students about to graduate from Oklahoma State University, employers that are interested in hiring OSU graduates were the participants that were needed in this research. All of the responding employers ( $n=91$ ) at the OSU Business Career Fair on September 16, 2008 were given the survey, along with the consent form, to complete and return in an envelope. The completed surveys were collected at the career fair, except for those employers that chose to mail in their completed surveys.

#### Assumptions

It is assumed that employers look for specific characteristics in their potential employees that would demonstrate a certain level of success the employee would achieve if hired. It is also assumed that the work culture of the organization of the employer

encourages success and wants employees that would demonstrate the characteristics that lead to success.

### Limitations

Employers may have personal feelings toward international experiences due to their own experiences with people from different cultures and nations and also from their own experiences abroad, and this may skew their feelings about study abroad experiences more positively or negatively. Someone who has studied abroad and had a positive experience may feel that college students should make studying abroad a priority in college. Someone who did not feel compelled to study in another country as a student or did study abroad with negative outcomes may feel it is not necessary. The biases of the employers will limit this research study.

While international experiences may allow students to gain and/or increase several skills that employers desire in new and recent university and college students, such as communication skills or the ability to adapt well to new situations, there are other ways to gain these skills beyond participating in a study abroad or international experience. This needs to be taken into consideration when determining which skills, or sets of skills, employers require when hiring new and recent college and university students.

### Data Analysis

The scores from the survey were statistically tabulated using the software Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Data was not tested for a non-response rate because the survey was given to recruiters to fill out anonymously. The survey was given to recruiters anonymously in order to encourage their participation. The researcher felt that allowing recruiters to respond without listing their name or organization would encourage more responses. Also, there was no need for a non-response rate because of the high return rate (61.07%) of the surveys.

Table 1

*Time Schedule (2008) Gantt Chart*

	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Complete Introduction & Literature Review	_____	_____	_____				
Complete IRB Approval			_____	_____			
Execute Study				_____			
Analyze Data				_____	_____		
Finish Report					_____	_____	



### Summary

This chapter described the quantitative method used to conduct the study. The researcher used a survey, with permission from the authors, from *Employer Attitudes toward Study Abroad* from *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. It was developed by Stevan Trooboff from the Council for International Educational Exchange, Michael Vande Berg from the Council for International Educational Exchange, and Jack Rayman from The Pennsylvania State University. On September 16, 2008, 149 employers who attended the OSU Business Career Fair completed the survey.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

Chapter I supplied the background and the need to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university graduates. It demonstrated the lack of knowledge most 18 to 24 year-old Americans have about other nations and cultures. It also demonstrated the value of this research in how it relates to the study abroad goals at OSU and in the state of Oklahoma. The primary purpose of this study was to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university graduates. To achieve the purpose of this study, the specific objectives were to:

1. Describe the characteristics of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiters and recruiting organizations (employers), including any study abroad experiences of the recruiters;
2. Determine how employers viewed different types of educational experiences, including study abroad and/or international experiences;
3. Determine which personal qualities of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
4. Determine which skills of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
5. Determine employers' perceptions of what qualities study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students;
6. Determine employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees;

7. Determine what, if any, value employers placed on foreign language skills; and
8. Discover if so, and then how often, employers ask students about their study abroad and/or international experiences during formal interviews.

Chapter I also included the problem statement, purpose and objectives, definition of terms, scope of the study assumptions of the study, limitations of the study, and significance of the study.

Chapter II provided an analysis of how prepared new and recent graduates are for employment, the skills that employers look for in prospective employees, how a student could communicate an international experience effectively to an employer, how a college or university can support international initiatives, and a summary.

Chapter III addressed the Institutional Review Board approval, population, instrumentation, research design and procedure, assumptions, limitations, data analysis, and summary.

Chapter IV summarizes the data.

### Findings Related to Objective One

Objective 1 was to describe the characteristics of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiters and recruiting organizations, including any study abroad experiences of the recruiters. One hundred forty-nine representatives (N=149) from different recruiting organizations received surveys at the career fair with 91 (n=91) employers completing surveys. The response rate for the survey was 61.07 percent.

The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked what position they held in their firm/organization/agency. Ninety-one (100%) usable responses were obtained. Two (2.2%) responded “President or CEO,” three (3.3%) responded “Work in the office of the President or CEO,” forty-nine (53.8%) responded “On-campus recruiter or other HR professional,” and thirty-seven (40.7%) responded “Other (please specify):\_\_\_\_\_.” Some examples of these include: “Director of Recruiting & Selection,” “Account Manager,” “Vice President,” “Accountant,” and “Marketing Director.”

In regards to the firm/organization/agency of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents, they were asked to indicate whether their firm/organization/agency

was for profit or not for profit. Eighty-nine (97.8%) usable responses were obtained. Seventy-one (78%) responded “For profit,” and eighteen (19.8%) responded “Not for profit.”

Then, the OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to indicate whether his or her firm/organization/agency was U.S. or multinational. Ninety (98.9%) usable responses were obtained. Fifty-eight (63.7%) responded “U.S.,” and thirty-two (35.2%) responded “Multinational.”

They were also asked to indicate the size of his or her firm/organization/agency. Ninety-one (100%) usable responses were obtained. Eight (8.8%) responded “Small (1-100 employees),” thirty-one (34.1%) responded “Medium (101-5,000 employees),” and fifty-two (57.1%) responded “Large (more than 5,000 employees).”

The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to indicate if their firm/organization/agency was a non-governmental organization, a state or federal agency, or neither. Ninety (98.9%) usable responses were obtained. Fifty-two (57.1%) responded “A non-governmental organization,” eighteen (19.8%) responded “A state or federal agency,” and twenty (22.0%) responded “Neither.”

The primary function of their firm/organization/agency was the next question the OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to indicate. Ninety-one (100%) usable responses were obtained. Forty-three (47.3%) responded “Service (bank, consulting, communication, advertising, law, etc.),” twelve (13.2%) responded “Manufacturing,” four (4.4%) responded “Education,” and thirty-two (35.2%) responded “Other (please specify):\_\_\_\_\_.” Five respondents wrote in “Oil and Gas,” and three respondents wrote in “Insurance.” Four other respondents wrote in “Retail.” Other examples include: “Casino,” “Biomedical Research,” “Accounting,” and “Aviation Administration.”

Then the OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to appropriately indicate the extent to which their firm/organization/agency conducts business internationally. Eighty-nine (97.8%) usable responses were obtained. Twenty-three (25.3%) responded “Extensively,” seventeen (18.7%) responded “Moderately,” twenty-one (23.1%) responded “Slightly,” twenty-eight (30.8%) responded “Not at all.”

The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked the percentage of their firm's/organization's/agency's revenue from international sales/activities. If the respondent responded "Not at all" to the previous question, then he or she skipped this question. Forty-nine (53.8%) usable responses were obtained. One (1.1%) responded "75% or more," five (5.5%) responded "50-74%," twelve (13.2%) responded "25-49%," twelve more (13.2%) responded "10-24%," and nineteen (20.9%) responded "1-9%."

The next questions involved the respondent's personal experience studying abroad. The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked if they studied abroad as an undergraduate, a graduate student or not at all. Eighty-nine (97.8%) usable responses were obtained. Six (6.6%) responded "I studied abroad as an undergraduate," five (5.5%) responded "I studied abroad as a graduate student," and seventy-eight (85.7%) responded "I did not study abroad."

For the OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents who did study abroad, they were asked to indicate if they received academic credit for their study abroad experience. Eleven (12.1%) usable responses were obtained. This accurately represents the percentage of recruiter respondents that indicated they studied abroad as an undergraduate or graduate student. Ten (11.0%) responded "Yes," and one (1.1%) responded "No."

If the respondent did not study abroad, then they were supposed to skip this question. The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to indicate the length of time for which they studied abroad. Eleven (12.1%) usable responses were obtained. This accurately represents the percentage of recruiter respondents that indicated he or she studied abroad as an undergraduate or graduate student. Five (5.5%) responded "1-3 weeks," four (4.4%) responded "4-10 weeks," two (2.2%) responded "one semester," and no one indicated either "one academic year" or "other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)." Despite none of the respondents indicating "other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)," there was one write-in of "3 months."

Again, if the respondent did not study abroad, then they were supposed to skip the next three questions. Of those respondents who responded they did study abroad, they were asked to indicate the nature of their study abroad experience. Respondents were able to indicate multiple selections. Seven responded "Classes taught by one or more of your

own institution's professors," seven responded "Classes taught by one or more professors from a university abroad," two responded "Service learning/Community service," one responded "Internship or work experience," and one responded "Other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)." However, one respondent wrote in "language training/culture training" and another wrote in "toured international businesses."

### Findings Related to Objective Two

Objective 2 was to determine how employers viewed different types of study abroad and/or international experiences.

The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to rank how important different study abroad/international experiences were to their firm/organization/agency on a Likert scale with a range of five, indicating the highest importance, to one, indicating the lowest importance. Overall, most respondents did not highly value different study abroad experiences (see Table 2). The highest rating was 3.66 for a prospective employee having a major in a subject area relevant to the work needs of the firm/organization/agency. The next highest was 2.05 for a prospective employee having completed a major or minor in a Foreign Language. However, the standard deviations for both of these were somewhat high. The number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Employers' perceptions of the importance of study abroad and/or international experiences*

	No. of Respondents	M	SD
Studied abroad in an English-speaking country as a college student	80	1.71	.983
Lived and studied in an English-speaking foreign country as a high school student for 1-4 years	81	1.67	.987
Worked for two months in a foreign country as a college student	81	1.79	1.057
Completed a one-semester internship in a foreign country	81	1.83	1.022
Lived and studied in a non-English speaking foreign country for 1-4 years as a high school student	81	1.83	1.082
Studied abroad in a non-English-speaking foreign country as a college student	81	1.85	1.026
Majored in a subject relevant to the work needs of my firm/organization/agency	80	3.66	1.466
Completed an Area Studies certificate (focusing on the history, politics, economics and geography of Asia or some other foreign geographical area)	81	1.54	.837
Completed a minor in International Business	81	1.78	.866
Completed a major in International Business	81	1.79	.971
Completed a major or minor in a Foreign Language	81	2.05	1.139

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance

### Findings Related to Objective Three

Objective 3 was to determine which personal qualities of prospective employees employers value the most. The employers rated “Honest; demonstrates integrity,” “Shows strong work ethic,” and “Self-motivated; shows initiative” as the three highest personal qualities (see Table 3). “Honest; demonstrates integrity” had the highest rating with a mean of 4.93, and it had a standard deviation of 2.52, the lowest standard deviation for the list of personal qualities. Out of this listing of personal qualities, “Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside of the U.S.” had the lowest mean, 2.36, and the highest standard deviation, 1.211. The number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation are presented in Table 3.



Table 3

*Employers' perceptions of the personal qualities of prospective employers value the most*

	No. of Respondents	M	SD
Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances	90	4.67	.519
Honest; demonstrates integrity	89	4.93	.252
Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside of the U.S.	90	2.36	1.211
Self-motivated; shows initiative	90	4.80	.565
Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds	90	4.47	.837
Innovative and creative	90	4.34	.767
Shows strong work ethic	90	4.82	.532
Listens and observes well	90	4.64	.624
Willing to take risks in order to learn new things	90	4.18	.907
Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal	90	3.86	1.012
Rational and logical	90	4.42	.734
Enthusiastic and outgoing	90	4.33	.887

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance

### Findings Related to Objective Four

Objective 4 was to determine which skills of prospective employees employers value the most. Of this listing of skills, employers value the skill of “Works well under pressure” the most with a mean of 4.59 and a standard deviation of .616 (see Table 4). Employers value the skill of “Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries” least from this listing of skills with a mean of 2.23 and a standard deviation of 1.209. Other skills that were rated relatively high include: “Effective working in teams;” “Interacts, communicates & works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone;” “Effective interpersonal skills;” and “Analyzes well.” The number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

*Employers' perceptions of the skills of prospective employees employers value the most*

	No. of Respondents	M	SD
Effective public speaker	90	3.50	.974
Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries	90	2.23	1.209
Effective interpersonal skills	90	4.47	.690
Well informed about world events and world history	90	2.81	1.069
Effective working in teams	90	4.54	.737
Analyzes well	90	4.41	.701
Interacts, communicates & works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone	90	4.49	.640
Works well under pressure	90	4.59	.616
Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures	90	4.32	.859
Effective expressing him/herself in writing	90	3.91	1.002
Knowledgeable about doing business in a country/region important to the firm	90	2.92	1.309
Knowledgeable about your firm's core business activities	89	4.31	.847
Good understanding of global economic and political trends	89	3.07	1.116

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance

### Findings Related to Objective Five

Objective 5 was to determine employers' perceptions of what qualities study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students. "Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal" was ranked by employers as the most important of the skills listed with a mean of 4.27 and a standard deviation of .956 (see Table 5). Other skills that received high importance include: "Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures," "Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds," and "Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances." The lowest rating was for "Knowledgeable about your firm's core business activities" with a mean of 2.89 and a standard deviation of 1.353. The number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

*Employers' perceptions of the qualities that study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students*

	No. of Respondents	M	SD
Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances	86	4.07	1.003
Honest; demonstrates integrity	86	3.09	1.325
Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside the U.S.	86	3.95	1.126
Self-motivated; shows initiative	86	3.67	1.231
Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds	86	4.10	.958
Innovative and creative	85	3.42	1.127
Shows strong work ethic	86	3.24	1.255
Listens and observes well	84	3.39	1.087
Willing to take new risks in order to learn new things	85	4.05	.999
Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal	85	4.27	.956
Rational and logical	85	3.15	1.258
Enthusiastic and outgoing	85	3.64	1.184
Effective public speaker	84	2.92	1.089
Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries	85	3.78	1.117
Effective interpersonal skills	85	3.59	1.116
Well informed about world events and world history	84	3.68	1.008
Effective working in teams	84	3.39	1.182
Analyzes well	84	3.11	1.193
Interacts, communicates & works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone	85	3.93	.936
Works well under pressure	85	3.35	1.202
Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures	85	4.15	1.041
Effective expressing him/herself in writing	85	2.96	1.159
Knowledgeable about your firm's core business activities	84	2.89	1.353
Knowledgeable about doing business in a country/region important to the firm	85	3.40	1.236
Good understanding of global economic and political trends	85	3.58	1.062

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance

### Findings Related to Objective Six

For objective 6, it was to determine employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees. Employers chose "Academic year program offering a semester of classes at a foreign university, followed by a semester internship" as the most significant study abroad experience that can develop the qualities and skills that employers are looking for in prospective employees (see Table 6). It had a mean of 3.01 and a standard deviation of 1.455. Both of the one to three week study abroad experiences tied for the lowest rating amongst employers with a mean of 2.27. The number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

*Employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees*

	No. of Respondents	M	SD
1-3 week January-term, May-term or summer program offering classes	79	2.27	.970
1-3 week January-term, May-term or summer service learning program	79	2.27	.970
4-10 week summer program offering classes	79	2.73	1.174
4-10 week summer service learning program	79	2.73	1.195
14-18 week semester program with classes taught outside a university	79	2.92	1.318
14-18 week semester program with classes taught at a foreign university	79	2.97	1.358
14-18 week service learning program	75	2.83	1.288
14-18 week internship with a firm/organization/agency in a foreign country	77	2.96	1.409
Academic year program offering classes at a foreign university	77	2.92	1.393
Academic year program offering a semester of classes at a foreign university, followed by a semester internship	77	3.01	1.455
Academic year program offering a semester of classes taught outside a foreign university, followed by a semester internship	77	2.96	1.409

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance

### Findings Related to Objective Seven

Objective 7 was to determine what, if any, value employers place on foreign language skills (see Table 7). “Verbal communication skills (speaking & listening) in a foreign language” were ranked higher than “Written communication skills (reading & writing) in a foreign language.” The number of respondents, mean, and standard deviation are presented in Table 7.



Table 7

*Employers' perceptions of the value of foreign language skills*

	No. of Respondents	M	SD
Verbal communication skills (speaking & listening) in a foreign language	82	3.22	1.217
Written communication skills (reading & writing) in a foreign language	81	2.94	1.144

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance

### Findings Related to Objective Eight

Objective 8 was to discover if so, and then how often, employers ask students about their study abroad and/or international experiences during formal interviews. The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were asked to indicate how often he or she asks candidates to discuss his or her study abroad experience, if they have indicated one on his or her résumé, during formal interviews. Eighty-seven (95.6%) usable responses were obtained. Eight (8.8%) responded “Always,” fourteen (15.4%) responded “Most of the time,” thirteen (14.3%) responded “Some of the time,” twenty-eight (30.8%) responded “Rarely,” seventeen (18.7%) responded “Never,” and seven responded “Does not apply (you don’t typically interview applicants).” The mean rating for respondents was 3.61 with a standard deviation of 1.417.

The OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents were provided with a section to include additional comments (Appendix D). One Business Career Fair recruiter respondent commented, “I studied abroad and thought the experience was awesome. I think everyone should do it. It should be mandatory in college. In our firm it is not a big deal.” The same respondent reported, “I value a student who takes the chance and is okay getting out of their comfort zone to experience new cultures and lifestyles.” However, another recruiter respondent commented, “International business experience will be more valuable in an employee's career during executive roles. Entry-level positions do not require international experiences, however, someone who is in tune with different cultures and perspectives definitely demonstrates some of our core business principles/values.” Also a point of interest, two of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiter respondents mentioned foreign language skills in Spanish as an additional benefit.

### Summary

These findings are important in determining the factors that prospective employees need to communicate to employers, identifying what employability skills are developed from international experiences, and in determining how to best prepare graduates for employment.

While employers do not rank study abroad experiences as highly important, they do value many of the skills gained from study abroad. Foreign language skills are not

highly valued, but employers highly deviated on this research question. Verbal communication skills were found to be of more value to employers than written communication skills. Also, employers rarely, if ever, ask during an interview about a study abroad experience if it is listed on a résumé.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### Summary

Many young people in the world today have a very limited view and lack of knowledge of the world (*Final Report: National Geographic-Roper Public Affairs 2008 Geographic Literacy Study*, 2006). “We need to ensure that U.S. students graduate from college with some minimal degree of knowledge of and sensitivity of the world” (Johnson & Mulholland, 2006, p. 5). Only one percent of the total students enrolled in higher education in the United States study abroad (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). While Oklahoma State University has a long-term goal of having all students participate in a study abroad (*OSU Accelerates Study Abroad Efforts; Sets Long-Term Goal of 100% Participation*), its students are studying abroad at about the 1% national average (OSU Study Abroad Office, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university students during the hiring process. This study desired to understand what, if any, importance employers place on international experiences, including study abroad trips, service learning programs abroad and international internships.

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Describe the characteristics of the OSU Business Career Fair recruiters and recruiting organizations, including any study abroad experiences of the recruiters;
2. Determine how employers viewed different types of educational experiences, including study abroad and/or international experiences;
3. Determine which personal qualities of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;

4. Determine which skills of prospective employees seeking employment employers value the most;
5. Determine employers' perceptions of what qualities study abroad and/or international experiences develop in students;
6. Determine employers' perceptions of what types of study abroad and/or international experiences provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that their organization values in hiring prospective employees;
7. Determine what, if any, value employers placed on foreign language skills; and
8. Discover if so, and then how often, employers ask students about their study abroad and/or international experiences during formal interviews.

#### Summary of the Review of Literature

The nature of the workplace is changing, and along with that change, the skills that employees need to be successful in the workplace are also changing (Carnevale et. al, 1990). Most employers want college and university students that have been educated in “global issues and developments and their implications for the future and the role of the United States in the world” (Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., 2006, p.2). According to the U.S. Department of Education, students can learn “critical thinking skills, ability to communicate to communicate in more than one language, ability to communicate across cultural and national boundaries, and the ability to make informed judgments on major personal and social issues based on the analysis of various perspectives” through study abroad (“Study Abroad: Enhancing International and Area Studies Education,” 2005). The U.S. Department of Education also cites studying abroad as encouraging personal growth, development and maturity among participants.

#### Summary of Methodology

A 19-question survey was used to gather data to identify the qualities, experiences and skills that employers value in hiring new and recent college and university graduates. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete. The survey was adapted from a

survey developed by Stevan Trooboff, Michael Vande Berg, and Jack Rayman. Their research in the article *Employer Attitudes toward Study Abroad* was published in *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*. The survey was used with permission. On September 16, 2008, 149 employers who attended the OSU Business Career Fair received the survey, and there were 91 respondents (61.07%).

### Population

Participants in this study were from the convenience sample population of employers who attended the OSU Business Career Fair on September 16, 2008. The sample population contained 149 employers, as that is the number of employers who attended the career fair and received a survey. These employers are relevant to the study because their attendance at the OSU Business Career Fair signifies their interest in recruiting and hiring OSU students.

### Conclusions Related to Objective One

Based on the findings of this study, most of the respondents were not the president or CEO of their firm/organization/agency and did not work in the office of the president or CEO. Forty-nine (53.8%) respondents were on-campus recruiters or other HR professionals. The majority of the respondents (78%) represented for-profit organizations. Over half of the respondents (63.7%) represented a firm/organization/agency based in the U.S. Thirty-two employers (35.2%) responded “Multinational.”

Over half of the respondents (57.1%) represented a large firm/organization/agency that has more than 5,000 employees. Only eight (8.8%) respondents were from a small firm/organization/agency with 1-100 employees. Thirty-one (34.1%) respondents were from a medium firm/organization/agency with 101-5,000 employees. Fifty-two (57.1%) employers were from a non-governmental organization. Eighteen (19.8%) represented a state or federal agency, and twenty (22.0%) responded “Neither.”

On the issue of the primary function of their firm’s/organization’s/agency’s, almost half (47.3%) responded “Service (bank, consulting, communication, advertising,

law, etc.).” For how much their firm/organization/agency did business internationally, the responses were fairly balanced. Twenty-three (25.3%) responded “Extensively,” seventeen (18.7%) responded “Moderately,” twenty-one (23.1%) responded “Slightly,” and twenty-eight (30.8%) responded “Not at all.” About half of the employers did not respond, or responded with an invalid response, to the question about their firm’s/organization’s/agency’s revenue from international sales/activities. With many respondents not responding to this question and over half of them that did respond having “Slightly” or not any business internationally, this will affect the outcome of the research.

An overwhelming majority (85.7%) of respondents did not study abroad. Only 11 (12.1%) of the 91 respondents studied abroad as an undergraduate or graduate student. Of the respondents that did study abroad, all but one of the respondents received academic credit for the experience, and none of the respondents studied abroad for a year. In fact, most of the respondents spent either 1-3 weeks or 4-10 weeks abroad during their study abroad. Only two of the respondents spent a semester abroad. Also, only one of the respondents completed an internship or work experience during his or her study abroad. Fourteen respondents took classes, and two completed service learning or community service.

### Conclusions Related to Objective Two

When asked to rank the importance of different study abroad and international experiences, employers do not rank study abroad experiences very highly. Overall, employers found the most value in majoring in a subject relevant to the work needs of their firm/organization/agency. While employers may not highly value study abroad experiences, they do place slightly more value on study abroad experiences in non-English speaking countries than English-speaking countries. Completing a major or minor in a foreign language was somewhat important with a mean of 2.05 and a standard deviation of 1.139. For a more thorough discussion of the value employers place on foreign language skills, read Conclusions Related to Objective Seven.

### Conclusions Related to Objective Three

Employers valued all of the personal qualities listed, and they placed the highest value for a prospective employee to be “Honest; demonstrates integrity” with a mean of 4.93 and a very low standard deviation of .252 (See Table 8). This demonstrates that respondents strongly agreed with each other on the high value of this quality. Out of the personal qualities listed, employers valued “Knowledge about one or two countries/cultures outside of the U.S.” and “Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal” the least with respective means of 2.36 and 3.86. Both of these qualities are related to intercultural and global competence. Other means in this category related to intercultural and global competence include “Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances,” “Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds,” and “Willing to take risks in order to learn new things.” See Table 8 for a ranking of how employers’ perceived the personal qualities of prospective employees. Note that the personal qualities that met the intercultural and global competence criteria that Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) developed from Deardorff and Hunter (2006) are in bold italics.

These findings are very similar to the findings of the instrument’s authors. In fact, the top three personal qualities are the exact same in ranking. In both studies, the intercultural and global criteria of “Listens and observes well” and “Flexible, adapts well” were ranked in the top five.

While it was not in the top five in this research, “Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds” was still highly valued as a personal quality by employers. Donham (2007) believes that this is going to be an increasingly important issue and that students need to develop this quality. Also supporting this research, Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) found that work ethic was an important skill.



Table 8

*Ranking of how employers' perceived the personal qualities of prospective employees*

	M
Honest; demonstrates integrity	4.93
Shows strong work ethic	4.82
Self-motivated; shows initiative	4.80
<b><i>Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances</i></b>	<b>4.67</b>
<b><i>Listens and observes well</i></b>	<b>4.64</b>
<b><i>Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds</i></b>	<b>4.47</b>
Rational and logical	4.42
Innovative and creative	4.34
Enthusiastic and outgoing	4.33
<b><i>Willing to take risks in order to learn new things</i></b>	<b>4.18</b>
<b><i>Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal</i></b>	<b>3.86</b>
<b><i>Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside of the U.S.</i></b>	<b>2.36</b>

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance; and Characteristics in italics and bold meet Deardorff and Hunter's (2006) intercultural and global competence criteria

### Conclusions Related to Objective Four

Three out of the top five skills that employers ranked as important in prospective employees were skills from the intercultural and global competence criteria from Deardorff and Hunter's research. These findings are similar to the findings of the instrument's authors. In Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman's survey, three of the top four skills employers highly ranked were also from the intercultural and global competence criteria. The top four from their survey were "Effective working in teams" with a mean of 4.73, "Works well under pressure" with a mean of 4.69, "Analyzes, evaluates, interprets well" with a mean of 4.60, and "Works effectively outside comfort zone" with a mean of 4.54. Note that the personal qualities that met the intercultural and global competence criteria that Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) developed from Deardorff and Hunter (2006) are in bold italics.

Other research has also found the skill of teamwork very important to employers. Curran (2007) cited the survey from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), and teamwork skills were found as a skill that employers highly valued. Carnevale et al. (1990) found that being able to work in teams has been linked to high productivity and product quality. The findings on teamwork in this research are also further supported by Crebert (2004), Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) and Peter D. Hart Associates, Inc. (2006); all of whom found that teamwork skills are very important.

Other skills that NACE listed (Curran, 2007) that were perceived by employers as valuable in this study include interpersonal and analytical skills. This study found "Effective expressing him/herself in writing" as fairly important, and written communication skills were also found important in the NACE survey (Curran, 2007). Further supporting this research, Casner-Lotto & Barrington (2006) also found that skills of written communication and critical thinking/problem solving are very important.

Table 9

*Ranking of how employers' perceived the skills of prospective employees*

	M
<b><i>Works well under pressure</i></b>	<b>4.59</b>
Effective working in teams	4.54
<b><i>Interacts, communicates &amp; works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone</i></b>	<b>4.49</b>
Effective interpersonal skills	4.47
<b><i>Analyzes well</i></b>	<b>4.41</b>
<b><i>Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures</i></b>	<b>4.32</b>
Knowledgeable about your firm's core business activities	4.31
Effective expressing him/herself in writing	3.91
Effective public speaker	3.50
<b><i>Good understanding of global economic and political trends</i></b>	<b>3.07</b>
Knowledgeable about doing business in a country/region important to the firm	2.92
<b><i>Well informed about world events and world history</i></b>	<b>2.81</b>
<b><i>Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries</i></b>	<b>2.23</b>

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance; and Characteristics in italics and bold meet Deardorff and Hunter's (2006) intercultural and global competence criteria

### Conclusions Related to Objective Five

In this research and in Trooboff, Vande Berg and Rayman's study (2007), honesty and integrity and shows strong work ethic were very highly rated as the top two personal qualities that employers seek in prospective employees. Neither of these qualities met the intercultural and global competence criteria, and in both of the studies, employers did not highly rate study abroad as enhancing these skills. However, flexible and adapts well and listens and observes well were also highly valued by employers in both studies. While flexible and adapts well was perceived by employers as being enhanced by study abroad, employers did not find that study abroad enhanced the skill of listening and observing well. Again, this is true for both studies.

From the survey used from Trooboff, Vande Berg and Rayman (2007) in this study, "Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds" was used as a personal quality. It was not listed in the article *Employer Attitudes toward Study Abroad* by Trooboff, Vande Berg and Rayman. In this research, employers highly valued this quality and also recognized that study abroad enhances this quality. All of the other qualities that met the intercultural and global competence criteria were valued by employers as being qualities that are enhanced by study abroad.

See Table 10 for a comparison between the qualities employers seek in prospective employees (Objective 3) and how employers perceive study abroad and international experiences develop those qualities (Objective 5). Note that the personal qualities that met the intercultural and global competence criteria that Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) developed from Deardorff and Hunter (2006) are in bold italics.

Table 10

*A comparison between the personal qualities employers seek in prospective employees and how employers perceive study abroad and international experiences develop those qualities*

	Importance in Hiring	Enhanced by Study Abroad
Honest; demonstrates integrity	4.93	3.09
Shows strong work ethic	4.82	3.24
Self-motivated; shows initiative	4.80	3.67
<b><i>Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances</i></b>	<b>4.67</b>	<b>4.07</b>
<b><i>Listens and observes well</i></b>	<b>4.64</b>	<b>3.39</b>
<b><i>Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds</i></b>	<b>4.47</b>	<b>4.10</b>
Rational and logical	4.42	3.15
Innovative and creative	4.34	3.42
Enthusiastic and outgoing	4.33	3.64
<b><i>Willing to take risks in order to learn new things</i></b>	<b>4.18</b>	<b>4.05</b>
<b><i>Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal</i></b>	<b>3.86</b>	<b>4.27</b>
<b><i>Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside of the U.S.</i></b>	<b>2.36</b>	<b>3.95</b>

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance; and Characteristics in italics and bold meet Deardorff and Hunter's (2006) intercultural and global competence criteria

While still highly ranked, “Effective working in teams” was ranked second in this study. In Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman’s study (2007) it was ranked first with a higher mean of 4.73. “Works well under pressure” was ranked the highest in this study with a mean of 4.59; in Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman’s study it was ranked second with a mean of 4.69. Employers did not see these two skills as being enhanced by study abroad in Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman’s study. While the importance is not as high as Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman’s research (2007), employers in this study found these skills as being more enhanced by study abroad.

See Table 11 for a comparison between the skills employers seek in prospective employees (Objective 4) and how employers perceive study abroad and international experiences develop those skills (Objective 5). Note that the personal qualities that met the intercultural and global competence criteria that Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) developed from Deardorff and Hunter (2006) are in bold italics.

Table 11

*A comparison between the skills employers seek in prospective employees and how employers perceive study abroad and international experiences develop those skills*

	Importance in Hiring	Enhanced by Study Abroad
<b><i>Works well under pressure</i></b>	<b>4.59</b>	<b>3.35</b>
Effective working in teams	4.54	3.39
<b><i>Interacts, communicates &amp; works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone</i></b>	<b>4.49</b>	<b>3.93</b>
Effective interpersonal skills	4.47	3.59
<b><i>Analyzes well</i></b>	<b>4.41</b>	<b>3.11</b>
<b><i>Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures</i></b>	<b>4.32</b>	<b>4.15</b>
Knowledgeable about your firm's core business activities	4.31	2.89
Effective expressing him/herself in writing	3.91	2.96
Effective public speaker	3.50	2.92
<b><i>Good understanding of global economic and political trends</i></b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>3.58</b>
Knowledgeable about doing business in a country/region important to the firm	2.92	3.40
<b><i>Well informed about world events and world history</i></b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>3.68</b>
<b><i>Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries</i></b>	<b>2.23</b>	<b>3.78</b>

*Note:* Scale: 5: highest importance, 1: lowest importance; and  
Characteristics in italics and bold meet Deardorff and Hunter's (2006) intercultural and  
global competence criteria

### Conclusions Related to Objective Six

Overall, employers did not rank study abroad and/or international experiences very highly. In the previous questions, employers found value and significance in some of the skills and qualities that matched Deardorff and Hunter's (2006) intercultural and global competence criteria. Employers in this study also indicated that many of the skills and qualities that they wanted in prospective employees were enhanced by study abroad. Using the list of skills for example, employers in this study indicated "Interacts, communicates and works effectively outside his/her comfort zone" as very important during the hiring process and also enhanced by study abroad. Again, employers in the study indicated "Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures" as important and also enhanced by study abroad (See Table 11). Employers also highly valued personal qualities that they also indicated as being enhanced by study abroad. These include "Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances," "Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds," and "Willing to take risks in order to learn new things" (See Table 10).

Employers did place more value on study abroad experiences according to the length of time spent abroad. This finding is supported by the author's of the instrument. According to Curran (2007) and supported by this research, completing an internship overseas where a student could gain real-world experience and cultural understanding at the same time would be even more relevant to employers than just taking a class abroad.

### Conclusions Related to Objective Seven

Employers found language skills of somewhat importance. "Verbal communication skills (speaking and listening) in a foreign language" were valued more than "Written communication skills (reading and writing) in a foreign language." Both Kaufman and Johnson (2006) and Trooboff, Vande Berg, and Rayman (2007) recognize the importance of language abilities. However, Norwood and Henneberry (2006) found in their research that employers do not highly value foreign language skills, and that supports this study. Also, Norwood and Henneberry (2006) found that students overestimate the benefit of foreign language skills.



It is important to recognize that Curran (2007) predicts that fluency in a foreign language will be in high demand in the future. International knowledge and intercultural communication skills are valuable abilities (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006). These are skills that college graduates need to gain during their experience at a college or university because employers lack the resources and time to teach these skills (Kaufman & Johnson, 2006).

### Conclusions Related to Objective Eight

Employers highly deviated on whether or not they even asked candidates with study abroad on their résumés about their study abroad during formal interviewing. Almost half rarely or never even ask. These findings are very similar to the findings of the instrument's authors. This has important implications for students to understand that they can take the initiative to talk about their study abroad and international experiences in networking and interviewing opportunities, even if they are not asked about those experiences.

### Recommendations

#### *Recommendations for Practice*

Both students and employers need to be educated. Employers need to understand that some of the many skills and qualities they seek in students are developed by study abroad and international experiences. It is important for those who are doing the interviewing and hiring to understand that a student's study abroad experience developed skills and qualities in the student that their company or organization would value. The offices of study abroad and career services on university campuses, including Oklahoma State University, should partner together to work toward educating students and employers. Personnel in career services work closely with recruiting employers to come to campus, and there is an opportunity there to educate.

Colleges and universities need to develop study abroad programs that employers will highly value. Also, colleges and universities need to teach students how to communicate their study abroad and international experiences in an effective way to employers. This could be the role of study abroad and career service's offices. While

study abroad offices promote that going abroad will benefit students, students need to know what the skills and qualities are that they should be developing and how to effectively articulate these skills. Faculty who lead study abroad programs can also play a role in this initiative by creating projects for participants that ensure the students reflect on their experiences in a meaningful way. Also, faculty members can be involved in advising students in how to market their study abroad experiences in an effective way to employers. Furthermore, students need to know that they should list study abroad experiences on their résumé, and students should also be prepared to talk about their study abroad experiences, including the relevant skills they learned through the experience, to employers whether the employer asks about the experience or not.

Also, it is important to target parents. In today's world of millennial students, parents are very involved in the lives of their college-age children, even through the hiring process. While career services and study abroad offices already provide some information to parents, more could be included about how to work with their student to help them effectively develop and communicate their skills to employers.

If colleges and universities want students to study abroad, then initiatives need to be taken to change the way study abroad is funded. Many students cannot afford to pay for a study abroad experience. Brustein (2007) offers the suggestion that study abroad fees and the money it takes to fund study abroad offices should be built into tuition dollars for all students, whether the students choose to participate in a study abroad or not. "Learning abroad is an academic priority and should be treated and funded no differently from other academic priorities" (Brustein, 2007).

As far as foreign language skills are concerned, it is important for students to understand that foreign language skills may or may not be highly valued by the employers they are targeting. It is important for students to work with their career services office to research employers in their specific industry, field or geographic area. If a student wants to work abroad, then the specific foreign language skills of that country or region would be an added benefit. However, learning a foreign language does not necessarily translate into a career advantage. Students should be prepared for this, and career services offices should work on educating students.

The recommendation for institutions from Deardorff and Hunter (2006) is that “institutions must devote time and resources in adequately preparing students for their education abroad sojourns, working with them to continue to develop key skills and knowledge while they are abroad and then working with the returned students in an intentional, focused way that enables students to maximize their overseas experiences” (p. 81).

### *Recommendations for Research*

While Deardorff and Hunter (2006) and others have identified skills and qualities for intercultural and global competence, there is more research to be done. Study abroad offices and universities push the idea of study abroad as a benefit to students. Students listen to advisors at colleges and universities for ideas of the best activities to pursue during their time there (Norwood & Henneberry, 2006). Educators at colleges and universities need to be more aware of what employers value and how students can develop and then communicate these values effectively. Also, educators need to be aware of ways that students can develop intercultural and global competence without going abroad. By creating opportunities for domestic and international students to interact, it is possible for domestic students to develop these skills. More research could also be done in relation to what skills and qualities study abroad truly enhances. Employers have opinions on what study abroad develops in students, but more studies need to be done.

## REFERENCES

- Altbach, P. G. (2002). Perspectives on International Higher Education. *Change*, 34(3), 3.
- American students studying abroad at record levels: up 8.5%*. (2007). Institute of International Education.
- Ashwill, M. A. (2004). Developing intercultural competence for the masses. *International Educator*, 13(2), 16-25.
- Brustein, W. I. (2007). The global campus: Challenges and opportunities for higher education in north america. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(3/4), 382-391.
- Carlson, J. S., & Widaman, K. F. (1988). The effects of study abroad during college on attitudes toward other cultures. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12, 1-17.
- Carnevale, A. P., Gainer, L. J., & Meltzer, A. S. (1990). *Workplace basics training manual. a publication of the American society for training and development*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Casner-Lotto, J., & Barrington, L. (2006). *Are they really ready to work? : The conference board, corporate voices for working families, partnership for 21st century skills, & society for human resource management*.
- Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Fellowship Program. (2005). *Global competence & national needs: One million americans studying abroad*.
- Crebert, G., Bates, M., Bell, B., Patrick, C. & Cragolini, V. (2004). Ivory tower to concrete jungle revisited. *Journal of Education and Work*, 17(1), 1-24.
- Curran, S. J. (2007). The career value of education abroad. *International Educator*, 16(6), 48-49, 51-52.
- Deardorff, Darla K. and Hunter, William. (2006) Educating global-ready graduates. *International Educator*, 15(3), 72.
- Deutsch, C. H. (March 26, 2008). Volunteering abroad to climb at IBM. *The New York Times*.

- Employers weigh in on value of education abroad. (2007). *International Educator*, 16(3), 8.
- Final report: national geographic-roper public affairs 2006 geographic literacy study.* (2006). Washington D.C.: Roper Public Affairs and the National Geographic Education Foundation.
- Friedman, T. (2006). *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York.
- Herrin, C. (2004). It's time for advancing education abroad. *International Educator*, 13(1), 3-4.
- House Concurrent Resolution, Oklahoma, 51 Sess. 3 (2007).
- Howe, N., & Strauss, W. (2000). *Millennials rising: The next great generation*. United States: Vintage Books.
- Jenkins, K. (2007). Does business have a place in study abroad? *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 24(19), 1.
- Johnson, Victor C., & Mulholland, Janice. (2006, May/June). Open doors, secure borders: Advantages of education abroad for public policy. *International Educator*.
- Kaufman, H., & Johnson, T. S. (2006, Jul/Aug 2006). Basic training for the global marketplace. *Chief Executive*, 26.
- Kratochvilova, Katerina. (September 26, 2008). (Personal Communication).
- Lenz, W., & Wister, J. (2008). Short-term abroad with long-term benefits. *International Educator*, 17(3), 4.
- Loveland, E. (2007). Preparing globally focused graduates. *International Educator*, 16(6), 18-21.
- McMurtrie, B. (2007). Study-abroad numbers continue to climb, trips are shorter, report says. *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 54(12), 1.
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2008). Public policy: Senator paul simon study abroad foundation act. Retrieved October 29, 2008, from [http://www.nafsa.org/public\\_policy.sec/commission\\_on\\_the\\_abraham/](http://www.nafsa.org/public_policy.sec/commission_on_the_abraham/)
- Norwood, F. B., & Henneberry, S. R. (2006). Show me the money! The value of college graduate attributes as expressed by employers and perceived by students. *American Agricultural Economics Association*, 88(2), 484-498.

*OSU accelerates study abroad efforts; Sets long-term goal of 100% participation.*  
Stillwater: Oklahoma State University.

OSU Facts and Stats. Retrieved October 23, 2008, from  
<http://osu.okstate.edu/presidentialsearch/facts.html>

Shah, A., Sterrett, C., Chesser, J., & Wilmore, J. (2001). Meeting the need for employee development in the 21st century. *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 66(2), 22-28.

Stuart, R. (2007). Stepping up to study abroad. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 24(19), 16-19.

Study abroad: Enhancing international and area studies education. (2005). Retrieved August 23, 2008

Trooboff, S., Berg, M. V., & Rayman, J. (2007). Employer attitudes toward study abroad. *Frontiers: the Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*.

Two-thirds of employers say graduates lack essential skills, concludes association of American colleges & universities initiative. (2007). [Periodical]. *The Hispanic Outlook in Higher Education*, 17(11), 44.

Ungar, S. J. (2008). Teaching worldliness to a new generation. *International Educator*, 17(1), 3.

## APPENDIX A

### Institutional Review Board Approval Form

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

Date: Monday, September 15, 2008  
IRB Application No GU0814  
Proposal Title: How Potential Employers View the International Experiences of Students During the Hiring Process  
Reviewed and Processed as: Exempt

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 9/14/2009**

Principal Investigator(s):

Janet Herren	Cindy Blackwell
4599 N. Washington, Apt. 331	444 Ag Hall
Stillwater, OK 74075	Stillwater, OK 74078

---

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 219 Cordell North (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

  
Sheila Kennison, Chair  
Institutional Review Board



## APPENDIX B

### Employer Consent Form

Dear Employer:

The office of Career Services at Oklahoma State University wants to learn more about the qualities, experiences and skills that employers value in hiring new and recent university and college students. I thank you in advance for taking the time to assist us with preparing OSU graduates for the workforce.

To conduct this research, we are surveying all of the participants at the OSU Business Career Fair today. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you can discontinue your participation at any time. There are no known risks associated with this project that are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life. Your identity will be kept confidential and will not be disclosed in any part of the study. Data from this research will be stored in a secure file cabinet in a private office, which is accessible only to the researchers until December 31, 2011. Data will only be reported in the aggregate; no individuals or employer organizations will be identifiable.

This survey contains 19 questions and will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The majority of questions will ask for information regarding your role in the hiring process at your place of employment and the qualities you seek in prospective employees.

By participating in this survey, you will help OSU identify the qualities that employers' value the most in prospective employees. Thank you for taking the time to assist us with preparing OSU graduates for the workforce.

If you have questions about the survey, you can call Janet Herren at (405) 747-884 or e-mail her at [janet.herren@okstate.edu](mailto:janet.herren@okstate.edu). If you would like to contact her adviser, you can reach Cindy Blackwell via e-mail at [cindy.blackwell@okstate.edu](mailto:cindy.blackwell@okstate.edu) or via phone at (405) 744-5133.

If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact Dr. Shelia Kennison, IRB Chair, 219 Cordell North, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-1676 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu).

By completing survey, you are giving your consent to participate.



## APPENDIX C

### The Survey Instrument

Oklahoma State University  
***How Potential Employers View the International Experiences of  
Students During the Hiring Process***

*This survey was adapted with permission from the survey used in the article Employer Attitudes toward Study Abroad from Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad. It was developed by Stevan Trooboff from the Council for International Educational Exchange, Michael Vande Berg from the Council for International Educational Exchange, and Jack Rayman from The Pennsylvania State University.*

Please respond to all questions by marking or circling the appropriate space or number.

1. What position do you hold in your firm/organization/agency? Please check the best response.

- ☐ President or CEO
- ☐ Work in the office of the President or CEO
- ☐ On-campus recruiter or other HR professional
- ☐ Other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)

2. Please indicate whether your firm/organization/agency is:

- ☐ For profit
- ☐ Not for profit

3. Please indicate whether your firm/organization/agency is:

- ☐ U.S.
- ☐ Multinational

4. What is the size of your firm/organization/agency?

- ☐ Small (1-100 employees)
- ☐ Medium (101-5,000 employees)
- ☐ Large (more than 5,000 employees)

5. Please indicate whether your firm/organization/agency is:

- ☐ A non-governmental organization
- ☐ A state or federal agency
- ☐ Neither

6. Please indicate whether your firm/organization/agency's primary function is:

- ☐ Service (bank, consulting, communication, advertising, law, etc.)
- ☐ Manufacturing
- ☐ Education
- ☐ Other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)

7. Please indicate the extent to which your firm/organization/agency conducts business internationally:

- ☐ Extensively
- ☐ Moderately
- ☐ Slightly
- ☐ Not at all

8. (If you responded "not at all" to Question #7, please skip this Question and go on to #9.) Approximately what percentage of your firm's/organization's/agency's revenue comes from international sales/activities?

- ☐ 75% or more
- ☐ 50-74%
- ☐ 25-49%
- ☐ 10-24%
- ☐ 1-9%

9. Please check all that are true:

- ☐ I studied abroad as an undergraduate
- ☐ I studied abroad as a graduate student
- ☐ I did not study abroad

10. (If you did not study abroad, please skip this and the next three Questions, and go on to #13.) Did you earn academic credit through your study abroad experience?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

11. Please indicate for what length of time you studied abroad (select the best response):

- ☐ 1-3 weeks
- ☐ 4-10 weeks
- ☐ one semester
- ☐ one academic year
- ☐ other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)

12. Please indicate whether your study abroad experience included (check all that apply):

- ☐ Classes taught by one or more of your own institution's professors
- ☐ Classes taught by one or more professors from a university abroad
- ☐ Service learning/Community service
- ☐ Internship or work experience
- ☐ Other (please specify:\_\_\_\_\_)

13. Please indicate how relatively important the following experiences are, in your firm/organization/agency, in considering prospective employees for employment, with “5” indicating the highest, and “1” indicating the lowest, importance:

Studied abroad in an English-speaking country as a college student	5	4	3	2	1
Lived and studied in an English-speaking foreign country as a high school student for 1-4 years	5	4	3	2	1
Worked for two months in a foreign country as a college student	5	4	3	2	1
Completed a one-semester internship in a foreign country	5	4	3	2	1
Lived and studied in a non-English-speaking foreign country for 1-4 years as a high school student	5	4	3	2	1
Studied abroad in a non-English-speaking foreign country as a college student	5	4	3	2	1
Majored in a subject relevant to the work needs of my firm/organization/agency	5	4	3	2	1
Completed an Area Studies certificate (focusing on the history, politics, economics and geography of Asia or some other foreign geographical area)	5	4	3	2	1
Completed a minor in International Business	5	4	3	2	1
Completed a major in International Business	5	4	3	2	1
Completed a major or minor in a Foreign Language	5	4	3	2	1

14. Please indicate how relatively important these qualities are in considering prospective employees for employment, with “5” indicating the highest, and “1” indicating the lowest, importance:

Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances	5	4	3	2	1
Honest; demonstrates integrity	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside the U.S.	5	4	3	2	1
Self-motivated; shows initiative	5	4	3	2	1
Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds	5	4	3	2	1
Innovative and creative	5	4	3	2	1
Shows strong work ethic	5	4	3	2	1
Listens and observes well	5	4	3	2	1
Willing to take risks in order to learn new things	5	4	3	2	1
Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal	5	4	3	2	1
Rational and logical	5	4	3	2	1
Enthusiastic and outgoing	5	4	3	2	1

15. Please indicate how relatively important these skills are in considering prospective employees for employment, with “5” indicating the highest, and “1” indicating the lowest, importance:

Effective public speaker	5	4	3	2	1
Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries	5	4	3	2	1
Effective interpersonal skills	5	4	3	2	1
Well informed about world events and world history	5	4	3	2	1
Effective working in teams	5	4	3	2	1
Analyzes well	5	4	3	2	1
Interacts, communicates & works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone	5	4	3	2	1
Works well under pressure	5	4	3	2	1
Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures	5	4	3	2	1
Effective expressing him/herself in writing	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledgeable about doing business in a country/region important to the firm	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledgeable about your firm’s core business activities	5	4	3	2	1
Good understanding of global economic and political trends	5	4	3	2	1

16. Please indicate the extent to which you believe that studying abroad would increase the likelihood that a prospective employee possessed the following qualities, with “5” indicating the highest, and “1” indicating the lowest, likelihood:

Flexible; adapts well to changing circumstances	5	4	3	2	1
Honest; demonstrates integrity	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledgeable about one or two countries/cultures outside the U.S.	5	4	3	2	1
Self-motivated; shows initiative	5	4	3	2	1
Open to and non-judgmental about people from different cultural backgrounds	5	4	3	2	1
Innovative and creative	5	4	3	2	1
Shows strong work ethic	5	4	3	2	1
Listens and observes well	5	4	3	2	1
Willing to take risks in order to learn new things	5	4	3	2	1
Recognizes that his/her worldview is not universal	5	4	3	2	1
Rational and logical	5	4	3	2	1
Enthusiastic and outgoing	5	4	3	2	1
Effective public speaker	5	4	3	2	1
Effective in socializing and conducting business in other countries	5	4	3	2	1
Effective interpersonal skills	5	4	3	2	1
Well informed about world events and world history	5	4	3	2	1

Effective working in teams	5	4	3	2	1
Analyzes well	5	4	3	2	1
Interacts, communicates & works effectively outside his/her own comfort zone	5	4	3	2	1
Works well under pressure	5	4	3	2	1
Gets along well with people from different races and foreign cultures	5	4	3	2	1
Effective expressing him/herself in writing	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledgeable about your firm's core business activities	5	4	3	2	1
Knowledgeable about doing business in a country/region important to the firm	5	4	3	2	1
Good understanding of global economic and political trends	5	4	3	2	1

17. Please indicate the extent to which you believe that the following types of study abroad experiences are likely to provide students with opportunities to develop the qualities and skills that your firm/organization/agency values in hiring prospective employees. "5" indicates highest probability, and "1" lowest probability, of providing such opportunities:

1- 3-week January-term, May-term or summer program offering classes	5	4	3	2	1
1-3 week January-term, May-term or summer service learning program	5	4	3	2	1
4-10 week summer program offering classes	5	4	3	2	1
4-10 week summer service learning program	5	4	3	2	1
14-18 week semester program with classes taught outside a university	5	4	3	2	1
14-18 week semester program with classes taught at a foreign university	5	4	3	2	1
14-18 week service learning program	5	4	3	2	1
14-18 week internship with a firm/organization/agency in a foreign country	5	4	3	2	1
Academic year program offering classes at a foreign university	5	4	3	2	1
Academic year program offering a semester of classes at a foreign university, followed by a semester internship	5	4	3	2	1
Academic year program offering a semester of classes taught outside a foreign university, followed by a semester internship	5	4	3	2	1

18. Please indicate the extent to which your firm/organization/agency values the foreign language abilities of prospective employees seeking employment, with "5" indicating the highest, and "1" indicating the lowest, importance:

Verbal communication skills (speaking & listening) in a foreign language	5	4	3	2	1
Written communication skills (reading and writing) in a foreign language	5	4	3	2	1



19. How often, during formal interviews, do you ask candidates to discuss their study abroad experience, if they have indicated on their resume that they had one?

- ☐ Always
- ☐ Most of the time
- ☐ Some of the time
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Does not apply (you don't typically interview applicants)

Comments:

## APPENDIX D

### Employer Comments from Survey Instrument

1. (Company Name) does not typically ask for international experience. But it is definitely a plus. Our sales/marketing dept would be the most interested in international exp due to the relationships we have in China.
2. Although we only have one location (OKC) our employees come from all over the world, as well as have the opportunity to, travel and collaborate with people internationally.
3. The mission of the (Company Name) emphasizes service to people of diverse cultural backgrounds, rural & urban underserved populations.
4. We do not hire for international positions, however the possibility of taking an international assignment is available within. I answered the survey for our North American company.
5. Spanish only due to locations
6. We are strictly based in the U.S.
7. It is not a requirement, nor does it make a candidate more qualified, but it for sure shows motivation, skill and integrity. Good experiences pay into work and career and the more learning experience, the better; whether it be US or outside US
8. Native experience/knowledge would be wonderful
9. We are more likely to hire a native to work in his or her own country rather than send a U.S. citizen to work in that country. We actually have recruiters in Singapore and the UK. We do have a few US-based jobs that benefit from knowing Spanish language.
10. I studied abroad and thought the experience was awesome. I think everyone should do it. It should be mandatory in college. In our firm it is not a big deal however, in Oklahoma we don't have a very diverse population. I value a student who takes the chance and is okay getting out of their comfort zone to experience new cultures and lifestyles. The experience can be life changing.
11. International business experience will be more valuable in an employee's career during executive roles. Entry-level positions do not require international experiences, however, someone who is in tune with different cultures and perspectives definitely demonstrates some of our core business principles/values.

## VITA

Janet Lynn Herren

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: STUDY ABROAD EMPLOYABILITY FACTORS: THE PERCEPTIONS OF  
CAREER RECRUITERS

Major Field: International Studies

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Ramona, Oklahoma, the daughter of Howard and Shirley Herren and granddaughter of Frank and Gene Herren and James Truman and Dorothy Collins.

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in International Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2008.

Earned a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Communications with a Minor in Spanish at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2006.

Experience: Women As Global Leaders Conference, March 2008, Dubai, United Arab Emirates; Career Consultant for OSU Career Services, July 2007-December 2008; Marketing Graduate Assistant for the School of International Studies, January 2007-June 2007; OSU Summer in Mexico Program, June 2005; Marketing Intern for the OSU New Product Development Center, January 2006-May 2006; Agricultural Ambassador for the College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources at OSU August 2004-May 2005

Professional Memberships: Phi Beta Delta; Student Association of Global Affairs; and Gamma Sigma Delta

Name: Janet Herren

Date of Degree: December, 2008

Institution: Oklahoma State University

Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: STUDY ABROAD EMPLOYABILITY FACTORS: THE  
PERCEPTIONS OF CAREER RECRUITERS

Pages in Study: 85

Candidate for the Degree of Master of Science

Major Field: International Studies

Scope and Method of Study: The purpose of this study was to investigate how employers view the international experiences of new and recent college and university students during the hiring process. This study desired to understand what, if any, importance employers place on international experiences, including study abroad trips and international internships.

Findings and Conclusions: The findings revealed that while employers do not highly value study abroad programs, they do highly value many of the skills and qualities that students gain during study abroad and international experiences.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Dr. Cindy Blackwell

---